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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE  
AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE  
IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
ENGLISH NOVEL

BY

BARBARA FRANCES TARLING M.A.

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE OPEN UNIVERSITY FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF ARTS: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

JUNE 2010



## ***Representations of the American War of Independence in the Late Eighteenth-Century English Novel***

### **Abstract**

For metropolitan Britons, the American War of Independence began as a traumatic civil war and ended as a global conflict that threatened the integrity of home and empire. This thesis examines the ways in which writers of popular fiction engaged with that crisis, considers why their preoccupation with the dispute continued for so many years after the peace treaty was signed, and suggests some reasons why the subject ceased to resonate as the century drew to a close. Through a series of individual case studies it explores the diverse ways in which the war is presented in a selection of novels published in Britain during the 1780s and 1790s, and reveals how they are shaped in response to contemporary political imperatives.

There has been a tendency to associate the overt politicization of the novel with the intellectual and political ferment of the 1790s but my research shows that this was not the case. Political critique was a key element in fictional representations of the American War. Topical controversies were hotly debated, the morality of the conflict was fiercely contested, and competing constructions of patriotism, nation and empire were interrogated and explored. Few of these works have been studied, however. Charlotte Smith, Robert Bage and Helen Maria Williams are better known for their radical responses to the French Revolution than for their fictional engagement with the events of the American War, whilst writers such as Samuel Jackson Pratt, Eliza Parsons and George Walker are now almost entirely forgotten. Nevertheless, the novels in this study are worthy of attention. Irrespective of their literary merit, which in some cases is considerable, they offer unique insights into the ways in which British writers and readers engaged with the politics of war, empire and revolution both before and after the momentous events of 1789.





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An early draft of Chapters Nine and Ten appeared as an essay entitled ‘The Slight Skirmishing of a Novel Writer: Charlotte Smith and the American War of Independence’, in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, edited by Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008) and I would like to thank Professor Labbe for her editorial comments.

Finally, I would like to thank fellow research students in the English Department at The Open University, without whose friendship and support this thesis could not have been completed.

### **Note on Style**

In the United States, the events leading up to the Declaration of Independence are commonly known as the American Revolution and the military conflict as the Revolutionary War. The use of the term ‘American War of Independence’ is more common, although by no means universal, in Britain. I have chosen the narrower term ‘American War of Independence’ for the title of this thesis because it reflects the Anglo-centric focus of texts which seek to explore the impact and significance of the conflict for the British people and polity rather than to document the complex causes that led to the emergence of an independent American state. For the most part, however, I follow the majority of eighteenth-century commentators in referring to the military confrontation simply as the ‘American War’. I also follow eighteenth-century custom in using the undifferentiated word ‘Indian’ to refer to the indigenous peoples of North America, but in full awareness of its ideological limitations.

## **List of illustrations**

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## **Introduction**

When the smouldering dispute between Britain and the North American colonies ignited into full scale revolution in the summer of 1775, British subjects on both sides of the Atlantic, who had hitherto considered themselves as part of a single national family, suddenly found themselves alienated and divided, confronting the prospect of an internecine civil war. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century a stream of pamphlets, essays, poems, prints and novels expressed the wide-ranging anxieties evoked by a conflict that not only divided the British people, but also undermined cherished perceptions of the British nation as a model of constitutional liberty, civic virtue, and patriotic endeavour. My thesis examines the ways in which writers of popular fiction engaged with that crisis, considers why their preoccupation with the dispute continued for so many years after the peace treaty was signed, and suggests some reasons why the subject ceased to resonate as the century drew to a close. Through a series of individual case studies, I explore the diverse ways in which the war is presented in a selection of novels published in Britain during the 1780s and 1790s, and



reveal the extent to which they are shaped in response to contemporary political imperatives. Taken together, the following chapters provide a comprehensive account of the changing perspectives that inform eighteenth-century fictional responses to the history and ideology of the American War.

Following the ground-breaking studies by Marilyn Butler, Gary Kelly and Janet Todd, and the innovative work of scholars such as Chris Jones and Nicola Watson, the multiple ways in which the late eighteenth-century novel of sensibility explored issues of public importance within its representation of a private, feminized world of feeling are now widely recognized.<sup>1</sup> However, because much of the defining work on fiction and politics has focused on the impact of the French Revolution, there has been a tendency to associate the overt politicization of the novel with the intellectual and political ferment of the 1790s. My research shows that this was not the case. From the early 1780s until the end of the century, political critique was an important element in fictional representations of the American War. Topical controversies were hotly debated, the morality and

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<sup>1</sup> Important studies in this area include Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993); Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790-1825* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Liz Bellamy, *Commerce, Morality and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain 1790-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

expediency of the conflict were fiercely contested, and competing constructions of patriotism, nation and empire were interrogated and explored. In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, all sorts of writers, male and female, provincial and metropolitan, radical and conservative, novice and experienced professional, recreated and commented on the events of the American War through the medium of fiction. Embedded within the framework of the courtship novel, sentimental travelogue, picaresque adventure, philosophical romance or didactic *bildungsroman*, fictional representations of the American War of Independence employed a range of literary strategies to express a variety of political opinions and to push the boundaries of the late eighteenth-century novel in many different directions.

Few of these works are well known, even to literary historians. The more obscure titles were only ever available in small print runs, and probably had a very limited readership, but others were the popular best-sellers of the day and a number gained currency in European markets. However, their publication history shows that by the early years of the nineteenth century nearly all of them had passed out of fashion, and the majority have been out of print for over two hundred years. Unlike many other 'minor works', fictional representations of the American War of Independence have failed to benefit from the recent resurgence of interest in

late eighteenth-century fiction.<sup>2</sup> Although popular in their day, writers such as Samuel Jackson Pratt, Eliza Parsons and George Walker are now almost entirely forgotten, whilst Charlotte Smith, Robert Bage and Helen Maria Williams are better known for their radical responses to the French Revolution than for their fictional engagement with the events of the American War. This critical neglect is largely a result of the privilege accorded to works that embody the ideological conflict provoked by the revolution in France, but it also reflects the way in which the literary fashions of the 1780s and 1790s were eclipsed by a new fictional landscape in the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Literary scholars have been more concerned to address the ideological clashes of the 1790s, and to investigate the first

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the works mentioned earlier, recent studies include April London, *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Susan C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance, Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); G. Gabrielle Starr, *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> A new category of 'Romantic fiction' has gained currency in recent years, building on the work of scholars such as Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See, for example, *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction 1780-1830*, ed. by Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008) and *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. by Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

stirrings of Romanticism, than to explore the last outpourings of sentimental fictional genres that were rapidly becoming outdated.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the works in this study are worthy of attention. Irrespective of their literary merit, which in some cases is considerable, they offer a unique insight into the relationship between history and fiction at a key moment in the development of the novel. As they frame their responses to topical events, they provide an unusually transparent view of the complexity and variety of the novel's engagement with contemporary politics, and demonstrate the extent to which writers and readers of popular fiction were implicated in the processes of ideological struggle. Long before the outbreak of the 'war of ideas' that is associated with the French Revolution, the novel offered an enclosed but flexible space in which competing moral, social and political ideologies could be presented, promoted and resisted. Fictional accounts of the American War not only take advantage of that opportunity: they also render the process more visible. The ways in which the debate was fashioned vary. Its parameters were determined partly by the generic conventions within which an author chose to work, and partly by the volatile demands of the literary marketplace, but also by changing historical and political circumstance. Over the course of two decades political perspectives shifted dramatically,

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<sup>4</sup> For an account of the ways in which residual strands of the eighteenth-century sentimental epistolary novel were accommodated within new fictional forms during this period, see Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*.

and fictional representations of the war reflect those changes. Novels that were written during and immediately after the conflict embody the anxieties about national identity and self-imagining that were provoked by a civil war against fellow subjects, and reveal the opposing constructions of empire that were highlighted by the dispute. Those produced in the 1790s, in contrast, are coloured by changing responses to the French Revolution and the European wars that followed in its wake.

My focus on the novel's engagement with historical and political events builds on a critical methodology that evolved in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Marilyn Butler's seminal work on the ideological dimensions of late eighteenth-century fiction was initially extended by Gary Kelly and later elaborated by other literary scholars in a number of significant ways.<sup>5</sup> Feminist explorations of the political valencies of eighteenth-century domestic fiction by writers such as Mary Poovey, Jane Spencer, Janet Todd and Laurie Langbauer were followed by influential studies of the radical novels of the 1790s by Chris Jones, Eleanor Ty and Claudia Johnson.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the revolutionary implications of the

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<sup>5</sup> Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*; *Women, Writing and Revolution*.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1660-1800* (London: Virago, 1989); Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Jones, *Radical Sensibility*; Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*.

sentimental seduction narrative and its impact on narrative form were elucidated by Nicola Watson, and the overt engagement of the novel of sensibility with issues of topical concern was demonstrated by Markman Ellis.<sup>7</sup> Studies of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century conservative fiction by M. O. Grenby and Kevin Gilmartin subsequently identified ways in which more reactionary cultural and political anxieties are accommodated within the novel, whilst Katie Trumpener, Harriet Guest and Angela Keane have extended the work on empire and nation that has been an important feature of eighteenth-century historical scholarship in recent years to studies of fiction in the romantic period.<sup>8</sup> Broadly speaking, all these studies fall within the critical school of ‘cultural materialism’ or ‘cultural studies’, and my interest in the ways in which the social and ideological anxieties associated with a significant political event (such as the loss of the American colonies) are represented in fiction, is rooted in this critical tradition.

Except for Angela Keane, whose chapter on Charlotte Smith includes a discussion of the American episodes in *The Old Manor House* and *The Young Philosopher*, none of these scholars examine fictional

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<sup>7</sup> Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*; Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*.

<sup>8</sup> Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*; Gilmartin, *Writing Against Revolution*; Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*; Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

accounts of the American War of Independence.<sup>9</sup> Christopher Flynn's recent study of the changing ways in which British writers imagined and represented American national identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries<sup>10</sup> contains the first account of the impact of the American Revolution on English fiction since the 1930s, when R. B. Heilman explored the repercussions of the war on the production of novels.<sup>11</sup> There are, however, significant problems with Flynn's thesis, especially his assertion that fictional accounts of the American War form part of a British counter-revolutionary endeavour 'to create an Anglo-American nation ... designed to survive the political dissolution between the two communities'.<sup>12</sup> In reading these novels as a post-war British attempt to re-establish a lost American empire, Flynn takes no account of the widely accepted pre-war understanding of a *transatlantic* 'English' identity, or of the complex and contradictory constructions of empire that the dispute with America brought into such sharp focus. Moreover, his narrative ignores the generic diversity and political disparity of the novels that he considers, and the historical particularity of their individual production and circulation. The textual analyses that he uses to support his argument sometimes draw conclusions that a reading which takes account of the generic and

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<sup>9</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, pp. 96-107.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Flynn, *Americans in British Literature 1770-1832* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> R. B. Heilman, *America in English Fiction 1760-1800: The Influences of the American Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1968), pp. 54-85.

<sup>12</sup> Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, p. 17.

ideological diversity of the texts shows to be mistaken. Fictional representations of the American War need to be considered individually rather than assimilated to a single reductive narrative, since conflicts and confusion over the central ideological issues are often manifested within, as well as between, novels. Far from presenting the coherent fictional perspective that Flynn proposes, these novels provide a space in which ideological uncertainties can be explored rather than a forum for the articulation of a single world view.

Although Heilman's taxonomic approach is now somewhat dated, I am deeply indebted to his pioneering work for assistance with the identification and location of source materials for this study. In the course of his research, Heilman examined 450 novels published in England between 1760 and 1800. More than half the novels that he catalogues contain some reference to America, and in at least twenty-five the American War plays an important part in the action. I have examined all the novels that Heilman records as making substantive use of material relating to the conflict, including a number that were known to Heilman only by repute.<sup>13</sup> Given the wealth of available material, it is impossible for a study of this length to be exhaustive, but I have selected the twelve works that are the subject of the

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<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this study, the most important of these are Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian*, 2 vols (London: J. Walter and J. Bew; Shrewsbury: P. Sandford, 1787; repr. New York: Garland, 1979) and George Walker, *Cinthelia; or, A Woman of Ten Thousand* (London: B. Crosby, 1797).



following chapters as symptomatic of the diverse and changing ways in which the American War is represented in the fiction of the period.

This study seeks to provide a wide-ranging account of an engagement that is characterized above all by diversity. The novels discussed in the following chapters draw on a variety of discourses and support a range of views. Their critique of the military activity of the state and the ideologies that supported it encompasses a range of literary modes, and their recurring tropes draw attention to the unique conditions that distinguished this transatlantic conflict from more prestigious, and supposedly better regulated, European confrontations. Novelists report the thoughts and feelings of the men who went to fight in America and record the fates that awaited them. They narrate the stories of the wives and daughters who accompanied them, and the young women who followed their lovers secretly and in disguise. They depict the anxiety of families who waited at home for news, and describe the economic hardships or social isolation they suffered as they did so. They lament the vulnerability of civilian populations whose homes lay in the path of rampaging armies and recount the dilemmas faced by those who sought to claim neutrality or to avoid the military engagement entirely. Through their accounts of its repercussions on a wide nexus of familial and affective relationships, fictional representations of the war simultaneously acknowledge the

disruptive nature of all military conflict and recreate the particular trauma of a divisive civil war.

In looking at these little-known novels, my research offers new and unique insights into the ways in which British writers and their readers engaged with the politics of war, empire and revolution both before and after the momentous events of 1789. It broadens understanding of the politics of sentimental fiction by providing material evidence of the multiple ways in which historical events inform, and are informed by, their literary incarnation. This study shows that fictional engagement with the events of the American War is an important precursor of the ‘revolution debate’ that dominates the novels of the 1790s, and my exploration of that engagement adds a further dimension to the evolving account of the relationship between fiction and politics in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In the chapters that follow, I examine the role of popular fiction in articulating the anxieties precipitated by a political crisis that ‘compelled different groups of Britons to re-examine the nature and boundaries of their patriotism’.<sup>14</sup> In so doing, I both draw on, and add to, the accounts of nation-formation that have been developed by historians of the period.<sup>15</sup> Benedict Anderson’s

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992; repr. Vintage, 1996), p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> The most important of these for my purposes have been Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987); Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, 3 vols (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Colley, *Britons*; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and*

telling phrase, ‘imagined communities’, not only emphasizes the constructed nature of nation and empire, but also underlines the significance of imaginative representation in the process of generation and dissemination.<sup>16</sup> Fictional accounts of the American War are an important part of that enterprise. In confronting the impact of warfare on the British polity, these representations span two decades of turbulence and encompass a range of ideologies, revealing the pressures and challenges that shaped the evolution and expression of cultural identity during a period of national upheaval. By elucidating the terms on which the reader’s access to the revolutionary disruption of the American War is circumscribed and controlled, I hope to add new resonance to the relationship between ‘story’ and ‘history’ in the late eighteenth-century novel and to show how a neglected fictional terrain is informed by a political urgency that reflects the cultural concerns of late eighteenth-century Britain as powerfully as works with which we are more familiar.

The relationship of fiction to reality is always a complex one, but, as William Ray observes, ‘there is no more logical place to learn about the status of fiction, history and narrative than in the texts where those notions

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*Imperialism in England 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003); Peter Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

converge most explicitly'.<sup>17</sup> Fictional representations of the American War of Independence provide a sequence of narratives in which that convergence can be studied. However, the profitability of such an exploration is crucially dependent on an understanding of eighteenth-century constructions of nation, patriotism and empire, and an awareness of the troubling ways in which the American War challenged those convictions. Before proceeding to an examination of fictional narratives, it is first necessary to unpick some of the anxieties that informed contemporary discourse concerning the war.

### *Family and Nation*

First and foremost, the conflict challenged the idea of the British nation as an extended transatlantic family. Before the war, eighteenth-century Britons and Americans regarded themselves as fellow-nationals, despite the distance that separated them. Indeed, the escalating disputes over taxation and representation on which their relationship foundered were premised on a common recognition of that bond. Supporters of the administration argued that the colonists were British subjects and should therefore be subject to taxation by the British parliament, whilst their opponents insisted that Americans had the same inalienable rights as other Britons, so could not be

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<sup>17</sup> William Ray, *Story and History: Narrative Authority and Social Identity in the Eighteenth-Century French and English Novel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. vii.

taxed by a legislature in which they were not represented. In 1764, the Boston Town Meeting opposed Grenville's proposed Sugar Tax because it struck at 'British privileges which ... we hold in common with our fellow subjects who are natives of Britain', and similar opinions were expressed in London during the debates on the Stamp Act in 1765 and 1766.<sup>18</sup> In 1770, General Conway opposed the introduction of an excise duty on tea imported into America, informing the House of Commons that he 'considered it the birth-right of every Englishman to have a voice in framing every law by which he himself is to be taxed'. He did not regard 'a fellow-subject in America less entitled to this inestimable privilege, than a fellow-subject in England', and his sentiments were echoed by John Wilkes, who argued that in matters of taxation and representation there was 'no difference between an inhabitant of Boston in Lincolnshire, and of Boston in New England'.<sup>19</sup>

This is not to dismiss or deny the ever-present tensions between imperial centre and colonial periphery, nor to underestimate the pervasive sense of cultural 'otherness' and estrangement that informs many representations of the American colonies. The conventional iconographic delineation of America as an exotic Indian maiden seen in prints such as

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Simon Schama, *A History of Britain*, 3 vols (London: BBC Worldwide, 2003), II, 367.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Stephen Conway, 'From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739-1783', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 59 (2002), 65-100 (p. 84); John Wilkes to Junius, November 6, 1771, British Library, Add. MSS. 30,381, 27. The prevalence of similar opinions in America is argued by Jack P. Greene, 'Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume II: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 208-30.

*The Parricide* reflects the mixture of fascination and unease with which many inhabitants of the British Isles regarded the nation's North American dominions.<sup>20</sup> To metropolitan observers, Americans often appeared both distant and provincial, displaying a lack of sophistication variously construed as virtuous simplicity or unpolished vulgarity.<sup>21</sup> Despite their differences, however, the majority of Britons on both sides of the Atlantic regarded themselves as members of a single national family, sharing a common history, language and religion.

Priding themselves on their mutual love of liberty and shared Protestant heritage, and bound together by cultural as well as constitutional ties, both Britons and Americans found the prospect of civil war deeply traumatic. Their apprehensions are summarized in the petition drawn up by a group of concerned Cambridge residents in December 1775:

With the utmost affliction, and the most anxious apprehensions, we behold a most ruinous civil war begun in America, which, we fear, if pursued, must totally alienate the affections of our fellow subjects in the colonies, and in the prosecution of which we can foresee no good effects that may arise to these kingdoms.<sup>22</sup>

Similar concerns were voiced in America. As the military conflict gathered pace, British subjects on both sides of the Atlantic were compelled to

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<sup>20</sup> *The Parricide: A Sketch of Modern Patriotism* (1776: British Museum). See also *Peace Introducing America and Britannia* (1775: Henry E. Huntington Library), *The Battle of Bunker's Hill, or the Blessed Effects of Family Quarrels* (1775: British Museum) and the replica of Francis Bird's 1713 statue of Queen Anne which stands outside St Paul's Cathedral.

<sup>21</sup> Conway, 'From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners', pp. 69-71.

<sup>22</sup> *Cambridge Evening Chronicle*, 9 Dec 1775.

choose where their loyalties lay. Their anxieties are expressed in all kinds of contemporary discourse; however, it is arguable that their presence in popular fiction provides particularly compelling evidence of their resonance.

Fictional and quasi-fictional representations of the war recreate these ideological conflicts for domestic consumption, constructing narratives of family disruption and division that mirror the disorder in the polity. Their parallel explorations of political and domestic authority depend for their significance on the widely accepted view of the patriarchal family as the origin of the state. In the mid-seventeenth century, Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* had explained the relationship between a monarch and his subjects in terms of paternal authority:

If we compare the natural duties of a Father with those of a King, we find them to be all one ... As the Father over one family, so the King, as Father over many families, extends his care ... all the duties of a King are summed up in an universal fatherly care of his people.<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, Filmer had argued that the paternal power in right of which the king governed was both absolute and interminable, unless voluntarily relinquished:

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*, ed. by Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), p. 63.

It is the favour, I think, of the parents only, who, when their children are of age and discretion to ease their parents of part of their fatherly care, are then content to remit some part of their fatherly authority.<sup>24</sup>

Although John Locke later challenged these claims and substituted a new contractual definition of political relationships for Filmer's patriarchal philosophy, the language of familial obligation continued to shape the discussion of civic rights and responsibilities throughout the eighteenth century. When Lockean ideas of consent were applied to the theory of colonial government they were expressed in familial terms. In the 1750s Francis Hutcheson described Britain's colonies as children, who should be granted independence when they had grown to maturity and were 'so increased in numbers and strength that they are sufficient by themselves for all the good ends of a political union'.<sup>25</sup> This argument was central to the dispute between Britain and America and Jay Fliegelman has traced its impact on the development of American political thought in some detail.<sup>26</sup>

Kathleen Wilson has argued that the use of familial terminology to describe the developing colonial crisis was almost universal in the 1760s and 1770s, as writers, reporters and satirists 'competed with each other in parading the images of familial dysfunction (blood brothers, unnatural mothers, patricidal daughters and over-indulgent parents) before the

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<sup>24</sup> Filmer, *Patriarcha*, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, 3 vols (London: A. Millar and T. Longman, 1755), II, 308.

<sup>26</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).



public'.<sup>27</sup> Politicians, philosophers, poets, novelists and businessmen shared the same vocabulary and drew on the same images to describe the aspirations, or waywardness, of the colonies and the nature of the imperial response. In both Britain and America, the imperial relationship was widely conceptualized as that of a family 'in which England enjoyed the rights and duties of parental authority over the colonies while the colonies enjoyed the corresponding rights and duties of children'.<sup>28</sup> In his *History of the American Revolution* (1790), the American Congressman, David Ramsay, recalls the way in which changing American perceptions of the colonial relationship were reinforced by changes in the parent-child analogy through which it was customarily expressed, noting that as the British progressively adopted more coercive policies, the colonists employed more negative images of the family. 'Instead of viewing the parent state, as formerly, in the light of an affectionate mother', he comments, 'they conceived her, as beginning to be influenced by the narrow views of an illiberal stepdame'.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, the competing claims of imperial authority and colonial autonomy are constructed in terms of these relationships and expressed in a familial language that has been described as

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *The Island Race*, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, 'The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation', *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972), 167-306 (p. 168).

<sup>29</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, 2 vols (London: printed in the year 1790), I, 45-6.

‘the very *lingua franca*’ of the dispute.<sup>30</sup> Familial metaphors were deployed on both sides of the argument, to justify imperial authority on the one hand and to make the case for colonial self-government on the other. In the aftermath of the Seven Years War, the reciprocal nature of the familial bond was used to underpin the case for new forms of colonial taxation and is a central plank of Soame Jenyns’s defence of the Stamp Act in 1765:

Can there be a more proper Time for this Mother Country to leave off Feeding out of her own Vitals, these Children whom she has nursed up, than when they are arrived at such Strength and Maturity as to be well able to provide for themselves, and ought rather with filial Duty to give some Assistance to her Distresses? <sup>31</sup>

Here, the colonies are viewed as unnatural children, still suckling on their mother’s milk as they grow into adulthood, and their perverse behaviour was invoked to justify the administration’s increasingly oppressive policies.

On the other side of the debate, Hutcheson’s arguments concerning maturity were seized on to oppose the coercive measures proposed by successive administrations and are rehearsed with particular clarity in Richard Price’s *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America* (1776):

Supposing, therefore, that the order of nature in establishing the relation between parents and children, ought to have been the rule of our conduct to the Colonies, we should have been gradually relaxing

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<sup>30</sup> Burrows and Wallace, ‘The American Revolution’, p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Soame Jenyns, *The Objections to the Taxation of our American Colonies, by the Legislature of Great Britain, Briefly Consider’d* (London: J. Wilkie, 1765), pp. 14-15.

our authority as they grew up. But, like mad parents, we have done the contrary; and, at the very time when our authority should have been most relaxed, we have carried it to the greatest extent, and exercised it with the greatest rigour. No wonder then, that they have turned upon us; and obliged us to remember, that they are not Children.<sup>32</sup>

This line of reasoning was put forward by John Cartwright to urge the case for American Independence, but it was also advanced by many Britons who opposed the administration's policy of coercion and called for reconciliation with the colonies.<sup>33</sup> In 1779, Josiah Wedgwood recounted a conversation with his new acquaintance, the young William Godwin:

In canvassing the relations of *parent* and *child* as applied to Britain and America, it unfortunately turned out, and we were both of us obliged to acknowledge the disagreeable facts, that we had driven out the brat in his infancy and exposed him in an uncultivated forest to the mercy of wild beasts and savages without any farther inquiries after him, 'till we imagined he might be brought to render us some essential services. We then took him again under our parental protection; provided him with a straight waistcoat, and whenever he wriggled or winched, drew it up a hole tighter, and behaved so like a step-mother to our son, now grown a very tall boy, that he determined to strip off his waistcoat, and put on the toga at once, and is now actually *carrying fire and water through the whole empire* wherever he pleases.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America* (London: T. Cadell, 1776), p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> John Cartwright, *American Independence The Interest and Glory of Great Britain* (London: J. Wilkie, 1774).

<sup>34</sup> The transcription of this letter in *The Selected Letters of Josiah Wedgwood*, ed. by Ann Finer and George Savage (London: Cory, Adams and Mackay, 1965), pp. 232-3,

Wedgwood's portrayal of America as an abused child, first cast out to run wild and then aggrieved by the measures used to restrain him, accurately reflects the impact of the *laissez faire* policies pursued by successive British administrations before the outbreak of the Seven Years War. During the early part of the eighteenth century, when British administrative authority was largely nominal, the American colonies developed many of the characteristics of autonomous states.<sup>35</sup> It was Britain's post-war decision to base a standing army in America, and the consequent attempts to raise a colonial revenue to maintain it, that precipitated the power struggle which Wedgwood's domestic imagery so vividly embodies. In his view, it is both natural and inevitable that the colonies should resent the harsh restrictions suddenly imposed on them and seek to replace the straitjacket of imperial domination with the toga of republican liberty.

Throughout the crisis, familial metaphors such as these simultaneously encoded the ideology of imperial government and conveyed the very real trauma of civil conflict. Only Thomas Paine rejected the analogy completely. In his phenomenally successful and highly influential *Common Sense* (1776), Paine resisted the application of the parent/child analogy to imperial politics and argued that familial metaphors were

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erroneously substitutes the word 'togs' for 'toga'. The correct reading has been verified by the curator of the Wedgwood Museum, which holds the holograph.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Mason, 'Britain and the Administration of the American Colonies', in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. by H. T. Dickinson (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 21-43; Stephen Conway, *The War of American Independence 1775-1783* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), pp.1-20.

primarily a device that allowed the advocates of absolutism to subvert the liberty of the colonial subject. He maintained that ‘the phrase *parent* or *mother country* hath been jesuitically adopted by the — [king] and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds’. In Paine’s view, the arguments put forward by the king and his administration merely emphasized their shameful conduct, for ‘even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families’.<sup>36</sup>

It was not only the geographic boundaries of the British state that changed as a result of the American War. The conflict was also the mechanism through which British and American subjects learned to identify each other as members of different nations rather than as fellow countrymen. There is strong evidence to suggest that it was the American alliance with France that finally fractured the familial bond. Linda Colley has argued persuasively that during the eighteenth century a specifically British sense of nationhood was formed largely in opposition to a hostile French ‘other’.<sup>37</sup> Although Colley’s thesis has been subject to searching critique and revision, it is clear that the Franco-American alliance of 1778 severely eroded perceptions of an extended Anglo-American transatlantic

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. by Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 84.

<sup>37</sup> Colley, *Britons*, esp. pp. 1-9.

community.<sup>38</sup> Instead of being viewed as recalcitrant children, the colonies came to be associated with Britain's most hated enemies. When France, Spain and Holland successively declared war on Britain and the fighting spread to the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, West Africa and India, the conflict could no longer be regarded as a simple family quarrel. The intervention of the Bourbon powers was instrumental in convincing both sides that Britons and Americans no longer belonged to the same nation.<sup>39</sup> It also changed the nature of the contest from a civil war into a global conflict that threatened the integrity of the British homeland and the safety of her wider empire. In response to this new challenge, different ideas of national belonging began to emerge that would enable fictional representations of the American War to resonate throughout the 1790s, when the trauma of civil war was largely forgotten and new dangers threatened the nation.

### *Patriotism and Politics*

The conflict with America not only changed perceptions of what it meant to belong to the British nation, it also challenged different groups of Britons to

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<sup>38</sup> For work that has extended or revised Colley's influential thesis, see, amongst others, Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer, eds, *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History* (London: Routledge, 1995); Wilson, *The Sense of the People*; J. E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Conway, 'From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners', pp. 96-8.

defend their notions of patriotism and justify their claims to represent the national interest. Patriotism was a deeply problematic term in eighteenth-century Britain, encompassing natural love of country on the one hand and sustained opposition to the expanding Hanoverian state on the other.<sup>40</sup> In Country Party terms, a patriot was someone who distrusted the ruling elite, was preoccupied with the perceived corruption of the polity, and placed the defence of liberty above the demands of loyalty to the state. The patriot ideal of liberty included freedom from foreign domination, particularly by arbitrary Catholic powers, but, as E. P. Thompson notes, it also embraced a variety of constitutional and common law freedoms:

Freedom from absolutism (the constitutional monarchy), freedom from arbitrary arrest, trial by jury, equality before the law, the freedom of the home from arbitrary entrance and search, some limited liberty of thought, of speech, and of conscience, the vicarious participation in liberty (or in its semblance) afforded by the right of parliamentary opposition and by elections and election tumults ... as well as freedom to travel, trade, and sell one's own labour.<sup>41</sup>

In both Britain and America, opposition commentators argued that the government's coercive measures infringed these fundamental freedoms and that the colonists, who were 'not only devoted to Liberty, but to Liberty

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<sup>40</sup> Comprehensive accounts of eighteenth-century patriotism include John Dinwiddy, 'England', in *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. by Otto Dann and John Dinwiddy (London: Hambledon, 1988), pp. 53-70, and Samuel, *Patriotism*, particularly the essays by Linda Colley and Hugh Cunningham.

<sup>41</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1963; repr. Penguin, 1991), p. 86.

according to English ideas, and on English principles', were therefore justified in their resistance to parliamentary authority.<sup>42</sup>

Evidence of the 'fractious and contradictory demands it [the war] placed upon the claims of patriotism and citizenship' can be seen in the testimony of those Britons who refused to take up arms against the colonists.<sup>43</sup> Opposing the projected use of force, the Earl of Chatham informed the House of Lords in 1775 that 'no son of mine, nor any one over whom I have influence, shall ever draw his sword upon his fellow subjects'.<sup>44</sup> Several high-ranking naval and military officers took the same view, including Admiral Keppel, who expressed his willingness to fight the French but refused to serve against the Americans, and the Earl of Effingham, who resigned his commission when his regiment was posted to America. The *Annual Register* of 1776 rehearsed Effingham's patriotic dilemma in sympathetic detail:

He accordingly wrote a letter of resignation to the Secretary at war, in which having declared the cheerfulness with which he would sacrifice life and fortune in support of the safety, honour, and dignity, of his Majesty's crown and person, he observed, that the same principles which had inspired him with these unalterable sentiments of duty and affection to the King, would not suffer him to be instrumental in

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<sup>42</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Speech of Edmund Burke Esq. on Moving his Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, March 22, 1775* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), p.16.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 247.

<sup>44</sup> William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, *The Speech of the Right Honourable the Earl of Chatham: in the House of Lords, on Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 1775* (London: G. Kearsley, 1775), p. 8.



depriving any part of his people of those liberties, which form the best security for their fidelity and obedience to his government.<sup>45</sup>

In some respects the contradictory demands of opposition patriotism were eased by the Declaration of Independence and the intervention of the Bourbon powers. As well as being instrumental in dismantling British perceptions of the Americans as fellow-countrymen, the Franco-American alliance sparked a threat of invasion that provided an urgent new focus for patriotic endeavour around which all Britons could unite.

To supporters of the administration, however, the arguments of opposition patriots were little short of treason. As I have already shown, the American War had all the intensity of a family quarrel and loyalist commentators were convinced that colonial insubordination, and British support for those who advocated it, was tantamount to patricide. In May 1776 a cartoon in the *Westminster Magazine* showed Britannia held captive by prominent members of the opposition while America, carrying a tomahawk and wearing a head-dress of feathers, prepared to stab her with a dagger. The etching is entitled 'The Parricide. A Sketch of Modern Patriotism', and it illustrates a quotation from a pamphlet by James Macpherson:

With an effrontery without example in any other age or nation, THESE MEN assume the name of Patriots, yet lay the honour, dignity, and reputation of their Country under the feet of her rebellious subjects.

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<sup>45</sup> *Annual Register 1776*, 'History of Europe', p. 42.

With a peculiar refinement on Parricide, they bind the hands of the MOTHER, while they plant a dagger in those of the DAUGHTER, to stab her to the heart; and to finish the horrid picture, they smile at the mischief they have done, and look round to the spectators for applause.<sup>46</sup>

Macpherson's description of patriot treachery is faithfully reproduced in the cartoon.



*The Parricide: A Sketch of Modern Patriotism*

Those leading Britannia to the slaughter include the Earl of Chatham, the Duke of Grafton and Charles James Fox, whilst John Wilkes directs America to strike the fatal blow. The cartoon provides a visual

<sup>46</sup> James Macpherson, *The Rights of Great Britain Asserted Against the Claims of America: Being An Answer to the Declaration of the General Congress* (London: T. Cadell, 1776 [1775]), pp. 70-1.

representation of the disloyalty and lack of principle that Samuel Johnson attributed to opposition patriotism when he denounced it as ‘the last refuge of a scoundrel’.<sup>47</sup>

Opposition patriotism had its roots in ‘commonwealth’ or ‘Country Party’ ideology. The significance of this ideological heritage, and its influence on both British and American political thought, has been comprehensively articulated by commentators such as Caroline Robbins, Bernard Bailyn and J. G. A. Pocock, whose work has examined the ways in which the American War and the coercive measures that preceded it intensified traditional Country Party misgivings about the loss of liberty implicit in the increasing patronage of the British crown and the corruption of the British constitution.<sup>48</sup> Country Party anxieties about the constitution predate the American War, but the conflict prompted renewed calls for reform. H. T. Dickinson has argued that eighteenth-century political debate is characterized by an increasing perception that:

the combined effect of the employment of a professional standing army, the increasing influence of money and the growth of Crown patronage allowed the Court to undermine the independence of

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<sup>47</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, 2 vols (London: Charles Dilly, 1791), I, 478.

<sup>48</sup> Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and The Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

Parliament far more effectively than the blatant abuse of the royal prerogative.<sup>49</sup>

This view is endorsed by Pocock, who points out that it had long been a fundamental axiom of Country Party ideology that ‘if the members of the legislature became dependent on patronage, the legislature would cease to be independent and the balance of the constitution would become corrupt’.<sup>50</sup> After the end of the Seven Years War, the coercive colonial policies adopted by successive British administrations convinced many observers that this process was gathering momentum, and the outbreak of the American War merely confirmed their fears.

In making the case for American independence, Tom Paine argued that the balance of the constitution had been fatally undermined:

That the crown is this overbearing part in the English constitution needs not be mentioned, and that it derives its whole consequence merely from being the giver of places and pensions is self-evident, wherefore, though we have been wise enough to shut and lock a door against absolute monarchy, we at the same time have been foolish enough to put the crown in possession of the key.<sup>51</sup>

Although few commentators in Britain were as bold as Paine, it is clear that anxieties about the constitutional effects of executive patronage were

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<sup>49</sup> H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 78.

<sup>51</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, pp. 70-1.

widespread. Even as the war compelled metropolitan Britons to turn their gaze outwards towards the often unconsidered colonial periphery, it also invited them to look inwards and examine the nature of civil society within their own polity. Many were troubled by what they saw. Writers of popular fiction draw on the history and mythology of the American conflict to record these apprehensions, expressing anxieties about the construction and performance of civic virtue and questioning the relationship between public and private conduct. A number of fictional accounts construct the war as the embodiment of state corruption, quintessentially exemplified in the professionalization of the army, the employment of mercenaries and Indians, and the destruction of civilian life and property. Although it resonates less powerfully to the modern reader than the rehearsal of individual suffering, the threat to property was of fundamental political significance in an eighteenth-century polity in which civic identity could only be realized through the ownership of land. For opponents of the war, the destruction and confiscation of homes and property that characterizes many accounts of the dispute, and which was held to have been exacerbated by the bitterness intrinsic to a civil conflict, became a compelling symbol of the extent to which the British polity had been corrupted.

Supporters of the administration viewed the conflict in a very different light. By the time the crisis came to a head in the mid-1770s, the British parliament had come to believe that American demands constituted

an attack on the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, a conviction to which colonial claims to be subject only to the authority of the crown lent considerable credence.<sup>52</sup> During the early years of the conflict, Lord North was able to command large parliamentary majorities in favour of his coercive policies but recent scholarship has uncovered the deep divisions that lie behind this apparent solidarity of purpose. It is now clear that ‘opinion within Great Britain ... was seriously fractured’ and that the divisions were both strong and virulent.<sup>53</sup> James Bradley has calculated that some 60,000 concerned subjects signed their names to loyal addresses and petitions supporting or opposing the use of force against the colonists and has established that many parts of Britain were seriously disunited in their response to the crisis.<sup>54</sup> The degree of discord is indicated by his revelation that of the eleven counties and forty-seven boroughs submitting addresses or petitions, nearly half (five counties and twenty-one boroughs) were so divided that they sent both supporting and opposing documents.<sup>55</sup> These disagreements are evidence of the extent to which the meaning of patriotism

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<sup>52</sup> Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, Ch. 4, ‘1776: The Revolution Against Parliament’, pp. 73-87; H. T. Dickinson, ‘Britain’s Imperial Sovereignty: The Ideological Case against the American Colonists’, in *Britain and the American Revolution*, pp. 64-96.

<sup>53</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 145; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 247. This assessment of the conflicted nature of the British response was previously advanced by J. H. Plumb, *In the Light of History* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), pp. 70-87 and John Brewer in *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 176.

<sup>54</sup> James E. Bradley, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England: Petitions, The Crown and Public Opinion* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), pp. 65-9, and ‘The British Public and the American Revolution: Ideology, Interest and Opinion’, in *Britain and the American Revolution*, pp. 124-54.

<sup>55</sup> Bradley, ‘The British Public and the American Revolution’, p. 136.

was constantly contested, and fictional representations of the war not only reflect this struggle but also engage with new understandings of patriotic behaviour that emerged as historical circumstances changed.

### *Anxieties of Empire*

Fictional representations of the American War are further complicated and enriched by profound uncertainties about the nature and validity of the imperial enterprise.<sup>56</sup> Even before Gibbon published his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (the first volume of which appeared in 1776 but which was not completed until 1789) the conventional understanding of Roman history included ominous warnings of the perils of over-expansion, the importation of luxury and decadence, the rise of militarism and the consequent loss of virtue and liberty. Nevertheless, until the middle of the eighteenth century most Britons regarded their own burgeoning empire as both virtuous and beneficent – a mercantile and maritime enterprise that Kathleen Wilson has described as ‘the ultimate patriotic project, diffusing wealth among the domestic population, protecting English freedoms (including the freedom of trade and navigation) from the threats of foreign powers ... and extending the birthrights of

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<sup>56</sup> For an account of some of these anxieties, see P. J. Marshall, ‘A Nation Defined by Empire, 1755-1766’, in *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History*, pp. 208-22.

Englishmen throughout the world'.<sup>57</sup> Imperial endeavour confirmed the national self-image of a prosperous, free, and Protestant people, who subscribed to an empire based on the peaceful pursuit of trade rather than on military conquest and who prided themselves on their superiority to the despotic Catholic powers, and the cruel tyranny of the Spanish empire in particular.

However, the dramatic growth in Britain's overseas activities during the eighteenth century provoked a radical reassessment of this mercantile construction, and in the second half of the century there gradually developed an empire, and a concept of empire, based on territorial acquisition and dominion over alien populations. This paradigm shift was precipitated by conquests in India and the spectacular victories of the Seven Years War. In 1757, the Battle of Plassey gave the East India Company control of Bengal. Two years later, British naval and military forces celebrated victories around the globe: at Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, at Minden, Cape Lagos and Quiberon Bay in Europe, and at Niagara, Ticonderoga, Crown Point and Quebec in North America. Despite the uninhibited national rejoicing that greeted the events of 1759 – David Garrick wrote his patriotic song *Heart of Oak* in celebration of 'a wonderful year', and Horace Walpole reported that

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<sup>57</sup> Kathleen Wilson, 'Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity in the English Provinces, c.1720-1790', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29:1 (1995), 69-96 (p. 85).



‘our bells are worn threadbare with ringing for victories’ – they ushered in a period of intense unease concerning imperial expansion and governance.<sup>58</sup>

As the Seven Years War drew to a close, many of these anxieties found expression in an extensive debate over the relative merits of retaining Guadeloupe or Canada as the prize of victory.<sup>59</sup> The issue was contested in more than sixty pamphlets, including one by Benjamin Franklin. In *The Interest of Great Britain Considered With Regard to her Colonies, And The Acquisitions Of Canada and Guadaloupe* (1760), Franklin argues that the retention of Canada would enhance the security of the existing North American colonies. He explicitly repudiates notions of empire based on territorial aggrandizement, and insists that ‘no colony, no possessor of lands in any colony ... wishes for conquests, or can be benefited by them, otherwise than as they may be a means of securing peace on their borders’.<sup>60</sup> He also suggests that Guadeloupe’s distinctive French identity made it an undesirable acquisition, since ‘a country *fully inhabited* by any nation is no proper possession for another of different language, manners and religion. It is hardly ever tenable at less expence than it is worth’.<sup>61</sup> Other commentators used exactly the same argument to make the opposite case,

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<sup>58</sup> *Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, ed. by W. S. Lewis, vol. 9 (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 251.

<sup>59</sup> Philip Lawson, “‘The Irishman’s Prize’: Views of Canada from the British Press 1760-1774”, *The Historical Journal*, 28: 3 (1985), 575-96 (p. 577).

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Interest of Great Britain Considered With Regard to her Colonies, And The Acquisitions Of Canada and Guadaloupe* (London: T. Becket, 1760), p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

one polemicist going so far as to forecast that whilst the acquisition of sugar-rich Guadeloupe would increase trade, boost revenue and disseminate wealth, the suspect loyalties of the French Canadians would require a permanent garrison of British troops, a standing army that would both offend against the constitution and be a permanent drain on the imperial exchequer.<sup>62</sup>

The debate subsided when the transfer of Canada to Britain was ratified by the Treaty of Paris in February 1763, but anxieties about the nature and governance of the empire persisted, and within days of the treaty being signed Lord Bute placed a proposal before Parliament to station a force of ten thousand regular troops across the Atlantic. This was the largest peacetime standing army in British history, and libertarian unease over its deployment was exacerbated by the ensuing attempts to raise a colonial revenue for its upkeep.<sup>63</sup> During the following decade, successive British administrations sought to tighten metropolitan control over American affairs, whilst their opponents on both sides of the Atlantic grew ever more apprehensive about new imperial legislation and the extent to which it was compatible with Country Party ideals of civic virtue, the legal protections offered by the common law, and the liberties guaranteed by the constitution.

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<sup>62</sup> *Reasons for Keeping Guadeloupe at a Peace, Preferable to Canada, Explained in Five Letters, from a Gentleman in Guadeloupe to his Friend in London* (London: 1761).

<sup>63</sup> Daniel A. Baugh, 'Maritime Strength and Atlantic Commerce: The Uses of "A Grand Marine Empire"', in *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, ed. by Lawrence Stone (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 185-223 (p. 203).

An ideological rift developed between a metropolitan authority that viewed the colonies as ‘*mere plantations*; tracts of foreign country, employed in raising certain specified and enumerated commodities, solely for the use of the trade and manufactures of the mother country’ and others, both in Britain and America, who regarded them as ‘*united to the realm*, in a full and absolute communication and communion of all rights, franchises and liberties, which any other part of the realm hath, or doth enjoy, or ought to have and to enjoy’.<sup>64</sup> These divergent perspectives characterize the parliamentary programme of colonial legislation during the early 1770s, and the opposition responses to it. Whilst administration supporters argued the over-riding importance of colonial submission to parliamentary sovereignty, opposition spokesmen lamented the erosion of liberties (including trial by jury and the freedom from taxation without representation) recognized as an inalienable part of the British birthright. Particularly sinister to opposition and American eyes was the Quebec Act of 1774, which not only allowed the French Canadians continuing recourse to French civil law and free exercise of the Roman Catholic religion, including the right of priests to receive tithes, but also sanctioned a form of government without an elected assembly. To the parliamentary opposition in Britain, and nearly all who called themselves Whigs in America, these provisions were a defiance of the constitutional protections against popery and tyranny guaranteed by the

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Pownall, *The Administration of the British Colonies. The Fifth Edition. Wherein Their Rights and Constitution are Discussed and Stated*, 2 vols (London: J. Walter, 1774), I, pp. 251, x.

Glorious Revolution and were seized on as evidence of a corrupt British government and a metropolitan society devoid of civic virtue.<sup>65</sup>

The perception that the imperial enterprise had become both a cause and a symptom of declining civic virtue became increasingly prevalent in libertarian and Country Party circles during the decade following the Paris treaty of 1763. Mounting anxieties about the nature and governance of the colonial settlements in North America were reinforced by deep misgivings about the potentially corrosive effects of an expanding eastern empire based on conquest and exploitation. This disquietude was heightened by parliamentary enquiries into the conduct of the East India Company in 1767 and 1772, which expressed public concern over the Company's trading monopolies and vast territorial holdings and disapproval of the large private fortunes accumulated by its employees. As Tillman Nechtman notes, metropolitan Britons increasingly began to view the nabob and his wealth as 'a metonymic symbol of the larger concerns surrounding the growth of British imperialism in India'.<sup>66</sup> The strength of their misgivings is apparent in Samuel Foote's satirical comedy, *The Nabob*. First produced in 1772, as Robert Clive and the East India Company were being investigated for the misgovernment of Bengal, Foote's play provides a caustic account of the moral corrosiveness of imperial expansion in India. It describes the plight of

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<sup>65</sup> P. J. Marshall, 'Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 15 (1987), 105-22 (p. 112).

<sup>66</sup> Tillman W. Nechtman, 'A Jewel in the Crown? Indian Wealth in Domestic Britain in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 41 (2007), 71-86, (p. 72).

Sir John Oldham, an English country gentleman and Member of Parliament who is threatened with bankruptcy and imprisonment by an aggressive and unscrupulous nabob. Sir Matthew Mite, who has recently returned from India, employs his ill-gotten imperial gains to bribe the electorate and secure Oldham's parliamentary seat for himself:

Preceded by all the pomp of Asia, Sir Matthew Mite, from the Indies, came thundering amongst us, and, profusely scattering the spoils of ruined provinces, corrupted the virtue and alienated the affections of all the old friends to the family.<sup>67</sup>

Returning nabobs like Mite, whose wealth endowed them with social eminence and political patronage unmerited by birth or breeding, were the focus of multiple apprehensions concerning imperial values, particularly when re-imported into Britain.<sup>68</sup> Deficient in civic virtue (as the owners of wealth divorced from inherited land) and tainted by habits of luxury, corruption and imperiousness, they represent the dangers of empire and the consequent corruption of metropolitan society.

Even before the American Revolution, the changing nature of the empire was a matter of concern. That so much new territory had been acquired by conquest rather than by trade was troubling. So too was the fact that Britain now ruled over large populations in India and Quebec who were governed without consent and whose cultural and political ethos was alien

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<sup>67</sup> Samuel Foote, 'The Nabob', in *Plays by Samuel Foote and Arthur Murphy*, ed. by George Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 81-111 (p. 84).

<sup>68</sup> Foote, 'The Nabob'; see also *The Nabob; or, Asiatic Plunderers. A Satyrical Poem, In a Dialogue between a Friend and the Author* (London: Printed for the Author, 1773).

to prevailing ideas of Britishness. These anxieties were crystallized and intensified by the outbreak of the American War and they shape and colour fictional accounts of the quarrel. Fictional representations of the American War are one of the avenues through which British imperialism is represented, disseminated and contested in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Through multi-layered plots, of which the American episodes typically form only a part, anxieties specific to the American conflict are articulated and explored within the wider context provoked by an interrogation of the role of empire and its impact on the British polity.



## Part One: The 1780s

A few months after American congressmen signed the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, James Barry, an Irish painter resident in London, produced his first political cartoon.<sup>1</sup>



*The Phoenix, or The Resurrection of Freedom*

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<sup>1</sup> For details of Barry's career and a full description of his works see William Pressly, *The Life and Art of James Barry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).



In Barry's etching, a group of mourners are gathered round the tomb of Britannia, gazing towards the Temple of Liberty, which can be seen in the background situated in an idealized American landscape. The inscription in the margin reads as follows:

O Liberty thou Parent of whatever is truly Amiable & Illustrious,  
Associated with Virtue, thou hates the Luxurious & Intemperate &  
hast successively Abandon'd thy lov'd residence of Greece, Italy &  
thy more favor'd England when they grew Corrupt and Worthless,  
thou hast given them over to chains & despondency & taken thy flight  
to a new people of manners simple & untainted.<sup>2</sup>

The sentiments epitomize the Country Party response to George III's American policy and the mourners behind the tomb are the heroes of Country Party ideology. Algernon Sidney, John Milton, Andrew Marvell and John Locke embody the tradition of parliamentary resistance to absolute monarchy, and their stance is endorsed by Barry himself, who is positioned on the far right of the picture space, looking back towards the viewer. The figure in the foreground, shackled in leg irons and with a torn copy of Habeas Corpus partly concealed under his coat, symbolizes the loss of ancient British freedoms, whilst the writing on the tomb laments the corrupt nature of contemporary politics. The cartoon was published by the bookseller John Almon, who was a friend of John Wilkes and a vociferous opponent of the British government, and it testifies to the fact that, for many

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<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 77.

Britons, the real significance of the American Revolution lay in what it revealed about the nature of their own polity.

The cultural and political preoccupations of the 1780s are markedly different from those of the 1790s and the bipartite structure of this thesis is designed to reflect and accommodate those differences. The first five chapters explore the various contexts within which the American War is represented in novels that were published during the 1780s. Before the political landscape was transformed by the French Revolution, fictional representations of the American War express and interrogate the competing concepts of patriotism and liberty that the dispute brought to the fore. All Britons agreed that patriotism and liberty were virtues, but whether that meant maintaining the nation's 'natural and lawful authority over its own colonies', as the ministry insisted, or defending the liberties of the freeborn Englishmen who lived in America from state oppression, as their Country Party opponents advocated, remained a vexed and troubling question.<sup>3</sup> *Emma Corbett* (1780), *Reveries of the Heart* (1781) and *Mount Henneth* (1782) were written while the conflict was still raging, and their engagement with the war has an urgency that is missing from later accounts. *The Fair Syrian* (1787) and *Adventures of Jonathan Corncob* (1787) appeared in the aftermath of the dispute, and reflect the mood of despondency and uncertainty that characterized the post-war period. High taxes, a reduction in

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Patriot* (London: T. Cadell, 1774), p. 22.

trade and a falling stock market combined to make life difficult for many Britons long after the peace treaty was signed, and the loss of national prestige was deeply felt. One provincial newspaper was still deploring Britain's lost glories in the summer of 1786:

Everything human ... has its period. Nations, like mortal men, advance only to decline; dismembered empire and diminished glory mark a crisis in the Constitution; and, if the volume of our fame be not closed, we have read the most brilliant pages of our history.<sup>4</sup>

The crisis of confidence triggered by the loss of the American colonies remained a significant factor until the end of the decade, when new dangers threatened the nation and fictional representations of the American War of Independence were reshaped to meet the fears and challenges engendered by the outbreak of the French Revolution and the changing balance of power in Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 19 August 1786.

## Chapter 1: The Discourse of Patriotism (1)

### *Emma Corbett; or, The Miseries of Civil War (1780)*

Scattered references to the American War of Independence can be found in novels as early as 1776 but the first extended representation appeared in 1780.<sup>1</sup> Samuel Jackson Pratt's *Emma Corbett; or, The Miseries of Civil War* uses conventional plot devices to explore the impact of civil war on the family and the nation, and to mount an attack on oppositionist discourses of patriotism. The novel presents itself both as the history of its eponymous heroine and as an account of the political catastrophe then engulfing the nation, and its dual title signals the divergent contexts within which the characters are called to act. Using a conventional fictional device – the conflict between father and daughter over the choice of a suitable husband – Pratt engages directly with matters of national significance, winning applause from those who believed, like the reviewer in the *London Magazine*, that sentiment could regulate public as well as private conduct:

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example Samuel Jackson Pratt (writing as Courtney Melmoth), *The Pupil of Pleasure*, 2 vols (London: G Robinson and J. Bew, 1776); Lady Mary Hamilton, *Munster Village*, 2 vols (London: Robson and Co; Walter; and Robinson, 1778); [Phebe Gibbes], *Friendship in a Nunnery; or, The American Fugitive*, 2 vols (London: J. Bew, 1778).

If the tears that must flow from the eyes of every feeling reader of this distressful story, have the power to abate the phrensy of family animosities, springing from difference in political opinions; if they are able to return some swords into their scabbards that have been drawn on both sides, or to prevent others from engaging in the bloody and fruitless contest; or if while is [sic] lasts, the horrid front of war is smoothed by humane and tender offices to the imprisoned captive and the wounded warrior, the author will have performed essential services to both countries.<sup>2</sup>

Written while the outcome of the conflict was still undecided, *Emma Corbett* provides a striking example of the complex ways in which historical circumstance and political dialectic are incorporated within the confines of the late eighteenth-century sentimental novel.

Samuel Jackson Pratt (1749-1814) was a well-known but somewhat controversial figure in late eighteenth-century social and literary circles. As a young man he abandoned his post as a curate in order to take up acting, and between 1773 and 1779 he appeared on stage in Dublin, London, Bath and Edinburgh under the name of Courtney Melmoth.<sup>3</sup> His career as a writer dates from 1774, when he published a poetic tribute to Oliver Goldsmith,<sup>4</sup> and his subsequent prolific output includes original works of poetry, fiction, drama, travel writing and criticism as well as a number of miscellanies and

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<sup>2</sup> *London Magazine*, 49 (1780), p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> *DNB*.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Jackson Pratt (writing as Courtney Melmoth), *The Tears of Genius. Occasioned by the Death of Dr. Goldsmith* (London: T Becket, 1774).

translations.<sup>5</sup> Some of his acquaintance found his avid pursuit of literary fame and financial profit distasteful,<sup>6</sup> but the memoir published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* shortly after his death pays tribute to an author whose works 'strongly tend to promote the interests of benevolence and virtue'.<sup>7</sup>

*Emma Corbett* was Pratt's sixth novel and, like many of his early works, was first published under his stage name of Courtney Melmoth. According to its dedication, the novel was written during the summer of 1779, although its completion was delayed by illness and it did not appear in print until May 1780.<sup>8</sup> A sentimental epistolary fiction in three volumes, *Emma Corbett* was a popular and critical success. Several new editions appeared over the next two years and the first of two French translations followed in 1783.<sup>9</sup> The *Monthly Review*, which had castigated the lurid tone of some of Pratt's earlier compositions, praised 'the variety of interesting incidents which fill up the narrative, and the lively, and sometimes pathetic, manner in which it is related', whilst the *Critical Review* not only complimented the author on his vivacity, imagination and ingenuity but also

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<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive list see April London, 'Samuel Jackson Pratt', in *DLB* 39, pp. 356-63 (pp. 356-7).

<sup>6</sup> For a full account of Pratt's literary career see Josephine Grieder, "'Amiable Writer" or "Wretch"? : The Elusive Samuel Jackson Pratt', *Bulletin of Research in The Humanities*, 81 (1978), 464-84.

<sup>7</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 84 (1814), p. 398.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Jackson Pratt (writing as Courtney Melmoth), *Emma Corbett; or, The Miseries of Civil War*, 3 vols (Bath: Pratt and Clinch; London: R. Baldwin, 1780), I, pp. iii-vi. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>9</sup> *Émilie Corbett; ou Les Malheurs d'une Guerre Civile*, (Londres [i.e. Paris], 1783).

congratulated him on a heroine who was ‘formed upon the models of Clarissa and Eloisa’ and ‘in point of literary composition ... is hardly inferior to either of those characters’.<sup>10</sup>

Using the device of the divided family to mirror the divisions in the nation, *Emma Corbett* describes the disruptive impact of the American War on two closely connected English families and explores its convulsive effects on their relationships. Charles Corbett’s children, Edward and Emma, have been brought up alongside his wards, Henry and Louisa Hammond, and on reaching adulthood the two young couples have fallen in love with each other. Corbett has encouraged the growing attachment between Emma and Henry but refused to sanction a marriage between Edward and Louisa, and this has caused some friction within the family circle. Edward goes to America to take charge of an estate that he has recently inherited from an uncle, having first secretly married Louisa. When his property is attacked by British troops he becomes one of the first casualties of the conflict:

His little territory was laid waste, — his house set fire to ... when the enemy advanced to his door, he was hurried into arms. He became a soldier on necessity. He fought — He fell! (I, 5-6)

The novel opens some months after the report of Edward’s death reaches England. Henry has recently obtained a commission in the British army and

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<sup>10</sup> *Monthly Review*, 63 (1780), 310-11 (p. 311); *Critical Review*, 49 (1780), 460-2 (p. 460).

is awaiting orders to embark for America when Corbett reveals that he is a committed, though covert, supporter of the American Revolution. He urges Henry to abandon a military career to which Corbett objects ‘both as patriot and as parent’, and when Henry refuses to resign his commission, Corbett forbids his marriage to Emma (I, 7). Like the Patriot opposition in the British parliament, Corbett regards the American revolutionaries not as rebels, but as the victims of a ‘fallacious plot against the rights of nature and mankind’ (I, 8) and his support for the colonial cause is intensified by the loss of his son. The novel goes on to interrogate the relationship between politics and parenthood, the rival claims of romantic love and filial obligation, and the devastating impact of civil war on both family and polity.

Christopher Flynn reads *Emma Corbett* as an exploration of the debilitating effects of sensibility, expressed through the use of a ‘controlling metaphor’ in which the nation is represented as a mutilated corporeal body as well as a dysfunctional family. He argues that the ways in which these ‘competing ways of figuring the nation’ contend throughout the novel (and others of the period) is ‘emblematic of the difficulty of expressing Anglo-America as a nation that could withstand conflict’.<sup>14</sup> My thesis adopts a different approach. Like many of the fictional accounts of the war that

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<sup>14</sup> Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, p. 25.



appeared during and immediately after the conflict, *Emma Corbett* is deeply immersed in eighteenth-century discourses of patriotism and I suggest that this provides a more productive context within which to read the work. In the course of the novel, Pratt explores the ways in which different characters negotiate their public and private responsibilities and considers whether their national loyalties are compatible with other moral imperatives. My discussion will therefore focus on the competing notions of patriotism that Pratt presents to the reader and the arguments he uses to differentiate between them. It will explore the ways in which Emma's conduct is contextualized by the patriotic ideologies of other characters in the novel, both within her family circle (Corbett, Henry and Edward) and outside it (General Washington and the Carbine brothers). The main thrust of this account is to show how Pratt structures his fictional material to present a devastating critique of Patriot [anti-ministerial] opposition to the war.

#### *Oppositionist Patriotism: Corbett*

Although Corbett has previously promoted the match between Henry and Emma, he forbids their marriage and discourages further contact between them when Henry accepts a commission in the British army and is ordered to America. His decision is entirely political and is unrelated to Henry's

intrinsic worth. In claiming to act ‘both as patriot and as parent’, Corbett assumes that the two roles are complementary and their duties compatible. However, his violent rejection of Henry proves otherwise. Corbett’s sudden and arbitrary opposition to Emma’s marriage, and the histrionic language in which it is expressed, signal the spurious nature of his brand of patriotism:

I would reject an EMPEROR that should pretend to the hand of Emma,  
and yet sacrilegiously pollute his *own* hand, in the life-blood of  
AMERICA. Oh, thou hapless land! thou art precious to me beyond the  
breath which I am now drawing! — beyond every hope that I can  
form on this side heaven! [*sic*] — beyond my daughter — yes even  
beyond Emma, because thou art equally the object of my love, and  
more of my *pity*! (I, 160-1)

Heilman dismisses the exaggerated violence of Corbett’s pro-American outbursts as the ‘hysterical tantrums’ of an overly sentimental writer bent on ‘squeezing the last droplet of sorrow from civil war’, but his assessment overlooks the distaste with which loyalists regarded the extravagant rhetoric that they associated with Patriot politics.<sup>15</sup> According to Johnson’s pro-ministerial pamphlet, *The Patriot*, the utterances of those who opposed the government were characterized by ‘virulence and invective’ and the ‘howling violence of patriotic rage’, and their vehemence was in direct proportion to the weakness of their arguments.<sup>16</sup> Corbett’s histrionic

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<sup>15</sup> Heilman, *America in English Fiction*, pp. 163, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *The Patriot*, pp. 6, 21.

language is clearly designed both to reflect his political affiliation and to emphasize the erroneous nature of the cause to which he is attached.

Equally significant is the fact that Corbett's bellicose opposition politics and his increasingly autocratic treatment of Emma go hand in hand. As he pours out his financial resources to assist the American cause, and seeks to avoid bankruptcy by promoting a match between Emma and his old friend, Sir Robert Raymond, fervent patriotism displaces paternal tenderness and his behaviour towards Emma becomes increasingly despotic. For those who believed, like Vicesimus Knox, that public and private identities were closely linked and that 'a bad husband, a bad father, a profligate and an unprincipled man, cannot deserve the name of a patriot', Corbett's failings as a parent underline the specious nature of his patriotism.<sup>17</sup> His passionate defence of colonial autonomy contrasts ironically with his refusal to grant a similar freedom to his daughter. It is only when grief at Emma's disappearance forces Corbett to reconsider his conduct that he recognizes that he has 'treated the most dutiful of children with unwonted harshness, and in the patriot ... extinguished the parent' (III, 25). His anguished reflection acknowledges that his concept of patriotism has been defective:

I should have taken my darling daughter to my bosom, and with an enlarged benevolence prayed fervently for the returning embrace of a

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<sup>17</sup> Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2 vols (London: Charles Dilly, 1782), I, 41.

divided people. *That* would have been true patriotism and true philanthropy. (III, 26)

Corbett's rejection of partisan politics and the construction of patriotism that defined it is a key narrative objective.

*Patriotism and Civic Virtue: Henry, Edward and General Washington*

Both Henry and Edward embrace a concept of patriotism based on an uncomplicated love of country and a willingness to defend it from attack, a stance that Pratt presents as more rational and ethical than the position that Corbett adopts. Edward takes up arms to defend the American estate that his ancestors had carved out of a wilderness 'inauspicious to every purpose of society' (I, 5). His decision is thus largely apolitical and his motives – family piety and defence of property – are entirely laudable. Henry's military employment is similarly legitimized by his conviction that the Americans are the aggressors in the dispute. His arguments – that 'it is sufficient to a soldier that he believes his quarrel to be just', and that it would be dishonourable to resign a commission that he has only recently accepted – are conventionally framed (I, 10). His probity is made manifest through a refusal to be deflected from his duty, either by Corbett's threats or Emma's tears, and his freedom from party prejudice is demonstrated

through an insistence that political difference need not impinge on private friendship:

May we not consider a public contest in different points of view, and yet be friends? Both may act from feeling, and both on principle. (I, 10-11)

Henry then explains to Corbett how he would have reacted if he had met Edward on the battlefield:

I can conceive the point on which nature would have insisted. She would gracefully have led us both, a little from the line of duty, and spared one in sympathy to the other. Nay, more. Had I seen the sword tremble at his bosom, my own should for that moment have been as a shield, and you know not *how* far I would have ventured for the brother of Emma. (I, 11)

Despite his sincere commitment to the British cause, Henry successfully negotiates the competing demands of private and public obligation.

On the opposite side of the dispute, Edward proves equally capable of differentiating between the dictates of private affection and the demands of public duty. As the plot unfolds the reader learns that Edward's death has been falsely reported, and when Emma disguises herself as a boy and travels to America in search of Henry she and her brother are unexpectedly reunited. Edward is astonished to learn that Henry is serving with the enemy but he immediately distinguishes between political and affective imperatives:

You find me here the foe of Henry, but it is not now the day of battle,  
and were he at this moment here, should I not expand these arms to  
receive the lover of Emma? (III, 72)

Temporarily abandoning ‘the fierceness of the soldier’ in order to act in his private capacity, ‘as a man — as the child of nature — as the husband of Louisa, and the brother of Emma’, Edward, like Henry, shows that public and private roles can be reconciled (III, 71).

General Washington’s brief appearance in *Emma Corbett* builds on the sentimental conviction that family and nation are contiguous (perhaps continuous) and mutually constitutive constructions, and a corresponding understanding of patriotism as an attribute of the sympathetic heart. When Emma first encounters her brother, she and Sir Robert Raymond (who has followed her to America at Corbett’s request) have been taken prisoner by the Americans. While Edward arranges for Emma to be moved to more comfortable accommodation, Raymond goes in search of a sympathetic listener, hoping to secure Emma’s release and facilitate a reunion with Henry by publishing the details of her story. The narrative of Emma’s virtue in distress is endorsed by the supreme authority of Washington himself, providentially quartered in the same town and presented in *Emma Corbett* as the archetype of the sentimental reader:

The General heard the story of her love as I related it. I concealed no part from him but that which had reference to my own former folly. I

brought the narrative down to the moment of reciting it. The soldier's cheek was not without the graceful dignity of a tear. He wept.

Sacred, said he, be the rights of hospitality: I am not at war with the *affections*. Ever privileged be *their* emotions. I feel them all. (III, 69)

In depicting the American Commander-in-Chief as the paradigmatic man of feeling, as well as the man of action, Pratt not only stresses his essential humanity and endorses his authority, but also promotes an understanding of patriotism as a virtue that recognizes and respects virtue in others.

Universally admired as a private citizen reluctantly assuming public office and taking up arms in defence of his homeland in the republican tradition of Cincinnatus, Washington seemed to many observers on both sides of the Atlantic to epitomize the ideals of patriotism and civic virtue. The issue of the *Critical Review* that praises *Emma Corbett* also contains a dismissive critique of a poetical epistle to Washington written by a native of Maryland, to which the aspiring poet had annexed a short sketch of the general's life. The memoir, noted the reviewer, 'makes us amends for the very indifferent verses', for 'lightly as we may think of the *bard*, we have a high opinion of his *hero*'.<sup>18</sup> In the transition from colonial subordination to independent nationhood, the American commander's virtues provided a self-evident contrast to the corruptions of hereditary monarchy, as Thomas Paine noted when he scornfully declared that 'no man in his sober senses, will compare the character of any of the kings of Europe with that of

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<sup>18</sup> *Critical Review*, 49, p. 472.

General Washington'.<sup>19</sup> Following the Declaration of Independence, Washington rapidly replaced George III as 'father of the American nation'. Jay Fliegelman has characterized this development as the substitution of a feeling, for a despotic father, and a similar process can be observed in every sentimental novel in which a father comes to repent the autocratic manner in which he has exercised his parental authority.<sup>20</sup> The plot of *Emma Corbett* exemplifies this dynamic and Raymond's meeting with the American leader adds resonance to the plea for paternal redefinition that is at the heart of Pratt's narrative. Washington's reaction to Emma's story defines the patriotic hero and newly constructed national leader as a man of sentiment, whose sympathetic response doubles as the rational endorsement of a judicious and enlightened father. His humane and generous conduct is as much a contrast to Corbett's despotic exercise of paternal power as it is to George III's autocratic treatment of the American colonies.

#### *Military Patriotism: Nestor and Julius Carbine*

The veteran soldier, whose wounds are a visible reminder of his patriotic endeavours, is a stock character in sentimental fiction and appears in several

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1792), in *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 236.

<sup>20</sup> Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, pp. 197-226; see also Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. p. 210.



novels in this study.<sup>21</sup> *Emma Corbett* includes an interpolated narrative that uses the story of two such veterans in order to further tease out the complex and conflicted relationships between private morality and the military activities of the state which are a primary source of anxiety in the novel. Writing to her cousin, Caroline Arnold, shortly after Henry's departure for America, Emma argues that war is the product of 'ambition, pride, and folly' and laments the suffering of those who are:

at this instant pining away on the sorrow-steeped couch, while the heedless multitude echo the praises of one who has earned a laurel at the expence of adding acres to his King, and anguish to his country-women. (II, 13)

Caroline's somewhat different views are conditioned by her background as 'the daughter of a veteran chief, and the widow of one who felt the military passion in all its force' (II, 30). She reminds Emma that military ideology privileges civic duty over personal interest and asserts that pacifist views such as Emma's simultaneously confirm soldiers' perceptions of female weakness and strengthen their resistance to it. In Caroline's opinion, soldiers are not immune to the spectacle of female suffering but they have learned to suppress their feelings of sympathy because 'the voice of public fame is, on these occasions, louder than that of private affection' (II, 31).

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth*, 2 vols (London: T. Lowndes, 1782; repr. New York: Garland, 1979); [H Scott], *Helena; or, The Vicissitudes of a Military Life*, 2 vols (Cork: James Haly, 1790) and Helen Maria Williams, *Julia, A Novel*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1790).

Caroline insists that the good soldier is also a man of feeling and that his public and private character are inextricably intertwined. She supports Knox's contention that a man who is not a good father and husband cannot be a good patriot, and sends Emma a torn and partially defaced manuscript that she believes will validate her argument:

It will show you that humanity and bravery are nearly allied, and that the tender husband and good soldier often form the same character, though they cannot always exert themselves in the same moment; or, perhaps, were we to scrutinize nicely, we should, in reality, find, that when the soldier is hazarding his life and liberty for that of his wife, his children, his countrymen, and his King, he is *then* the tenderest lover, the worthiest husband, the best parent, the most loyal subject, and the most valuable citizen. (II, 34-5)

Presumed to have been written by Caroline's father, *A Military Fragment* contains an account of his meeting with Nestor and Julius Carbine. The two brothers are not, as Flynn suggests, 'serving as orderlies at a field hospital at an undisclosed location', but retired soldiers living in a home for army veterans organized on similar lines to the Royal Hospital in Chelsea.<sup>22</sup> The visitors are shown round the hospital by Julius, who displays his wounds and describes the way in which he and his brother were 'nursed up for the service' from an early age (II, 41). The highlight of the tour is a visit to his brother, Nestor, who is busy instructing his children in martial manoeuvres and the dictates of military honour. The *Military Fragment* is an artful

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<sup>22</sup> Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, p. 27.

contrivance in the sentimental tradition of Sterne and Mackenzie. When the two brothers recount and reflect upon their military experience, the horrors of the battlefield are eclipsed by the patriotic rivalry with which they proudly exhibit their scarred flesh and amputated limbs as proof of their military prowess and loyal devotion. Their names invoke memories of the martial exploits of classical heroes but the tone of the narrative is domestic rather than epic. As Nestor drills his young sons in military manoeuvres, the art of war is re-inscribed as a serio-comic game in which martial values are softened by a sentimental ideology designed to render them more palatable. When the children display their prowess in a mock battle that replicates in miniature the civil and familial conflicts that dominate the primary narrative, comic, sentimental and heroic codes of value jostle each other uneasily.

Emma rejects the conflation of martial and sentimental values, arguing that Caroline's manuscript proves only 'that WAR, at best, is *terrible* as glorious' (II, 80). It is not the artful sentiment of the *Military Fragment* that calls forth her sympathy, but the spectacular account of the ravages of war presented in the prints that hang in her father's library. There she weeps bitterly, her tears elicited, not by images of defeat, but by 'the representation of a *compleat victory*' (II, 132). Whilst the *Military Fragment* records and celebrates the sufferings that soldiers are called on to endure, the library prints offer a graphic account of the suffering they inflict on others, and

Emma responds to that representation with passionate indignation. War is no longer the glorious and sentimental construction to which Julius and Nestor subscribe, nor the childish game in which Nestor's small daughter scatters rose petals to celebrate her brothers' victory; in Emma's eyes, as in those of the unknown artist, it is 'lawful and *glory-crowned murder*' (II, 133).

#### *Female Patriotism: Emma*

Whether and how women could perform as patriotic citizens was a matter of considerable debate in late eighteenth-century Britain. Although Lord Kames admired the heroic patriotism of Spartan and Roman women, he also believed that women were intrinsically less patriotic than men, because they had no civic identity:

The master of a family is immediately connected with his country: his wife, his children, his servants are immediately connected with him, and with their country through him only.<sup>23</sup>

James Fordyce went even further, believing that classical patriotism was incompatible with 'that gentleness and softness, which ever were, and ever

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<sup>23</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: W. Creech; London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1774), I, 169.

will be, the sovereign charm of the female character'.<sup>24</sup> In the many gendered constructions of patriotism that abound in the period, one underlying assumption predominates: whilst men might show their patriotism through political engagement and military action, women could only do so by enduring anxiety and bereavement, or by attempting to mitigate the effects of war through acts of charity and benevolence. Women who publicly cultivated a civic identity were liable to find their modesty and femininity publicly impugned. In 1779, Richard Jodrell's satirical poem, *The Female Patriot*, ridiculed Catharine Macaulay's claims to patriotism by asserting that she was more interested in the charms of her young husband than the welfare of her country. Similar tactics were employed to discredit the political activities of the Duchesses of Devonshire and Portland during the 1784 election campaign. Whilst their admirers represented their engagement in public affairs as a sign of patriotic endeavour, Thomas Rowlandson portrayed it as synonymous with unbridled lust.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike her father, who adheres to an oppositionist construction of patriotism and is therefore unable to negotiate the conflicting demands of politics and parenthood, Emma relies on her own moral judgment to help her to do what is right. From the outset she seeks to moderate the demands of the patriotic and political codes to which her father and her lover are

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<sup>24</sup> James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women; A New Edition*, 2 vols (London: 1775), II, 244-5.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Jodrell, *The Female Patriot* (London: J Bew, 1779); Thomas Rowlandson, *The Two Patriotic Duchess's on their Canvass* (1784: British Museum).

attached, and acknowledges that her private and specifically feminine concepts of loyalty are diametrically opposed to the public values they espouse:

I know nothing of state wrangles, or Congress quarrels. I mix not with the infuriate errors of party. I only act up to those simple principles of moral life, which assure me that constancy in favour of a *known valuable object* (not obstinate predilection to a *bad one*) is the basis on which the superstructure of all that is noble, just, and good, must be raised. (II, 208)

Scrupulously differentiating between public and private forms of conduct, she admits the propriety of Henry's engagement in the war 'according to the laws of *honour*', even as she weeps at its extreme horror 'when tried by the laws of feeling and humanity' (II, 6). She persistently disclaims any desire to 'interfere with the horrid virtues of Henry's profession' or to place herself 'betwixt him and his duty', even when she follows him to America (III, 85).

Emma's conduct throughout the novel is driven by moral rather than political imperatives, in accordance with Fordyce's precepts. She bases her resistance to paternal authority on a conventional understanding of the value of female constancy, citing Corbett's prior approval and the long standing nature of her love for Henry to justify her actions:

Your present avowed displeasure against Mr Hammond is sudden; but settled affection cannot readily accommodate itself to such revolutions. What is rooted in nature cannot, without much labour, be eradicated by art. As it displeases you, sir, I am concerned at this. But

shall I deceive, in order to make my peace? Shall I be *unnatural*, in order to be *filial*? Shall I propensely, set one great duty against another, and so destroy the excellence of both? (1, 73)

Because of the deeply entrenched analogy between the structure of the family and the structure of the state, eighteenth-century fictions of filial rebellion are always political (and potentially revolutionary) in nature, particularly when recorded in letters.<sup>26</sup> *Emma Corbett*, however, is carefully structured to suppress subversive readings and to justify Emma's defiance of her father's authority without sanctioning domestic or political rebellion. In adducing Corbett's paternal shortcomings as evidence of the meretricious nature of his patriotism, Pratt grants his heroine a freedom of opinion and action that would otherwise have been difficult to justify. *Emma Corbett* is not, as Flynn suggests, a tale of 'improperly inclined children'.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as Pratt makes clear, it could more aptly be described as the story of an improperly inclined parent. When Corbett's fanatical commitment to Patriot politics transforms him from a dutiful and considerate father into an imperious autocrat, his daughter is authorized to resist his oppressive measures.

The confrontations that fill the pages of *Emma Corbett* are not the public conflicts between opposing imperial and colonial armies, but private

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<sup>26</sup> For the political valencies of epistolarity in the late eighteenth-century novel see Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, and Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, p. 24.

contests between individuals, some of whom support the military activities of the state and others who are opposed to war in all its manifestations. For the most part, Pratt focuses on the actions of a small number of characters whose conflicting attitudes replicate the ideological contest raging in the nation. Whilst Henry and Corbett are actively engaged in the war, contributing militarily or financially to their respective causes, Emma and Raymond become the principal exponents of a pacifist agenda, their differing motivations constructed along conventionally gendered lines. Raymond's pacifism, like his political neutrality, is the product of a life spent in travel, which has convinced him that war is always an unnecessary and unmitigated evil. This contrasts with Emma's opposition to the war, which is an extension of her grief at the loss of Edward and her fears for Henry. Flushed with his own patriotic enthusiasm, Henry urges Emma to view his imminent departure as an act of 'graceful sacrifice' on behalf of her king and country, and not to rob him of 'that force — that ardour — that intrepidity — which are publickly due, in times like these, to *your* country and to *mine*' (I, 63-4). These are, as feminist historians and literary scholars have noted, the terms in which the call for women's patriotic response to a national emergency is traditionally fashioned.<sup>28</sup> In response to Henry's argument, Emma points out that loyalties are a matter of contestation during

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Wilson, *The Island Race*, esp. pp. 108-9, and Guest, *Small Change*.



a civil war and that their competing claims are often irreconcilable, particularly for women:

I love you, I hope, too much to dishonour you. About the rights of conquest I know nothing — I only know, that as I lost a brother on *one* side of this bloody question, so, it is probable, I may lose even *more* than a brother on the *other*; and yet, both persuaded me they were in the way of their duty. Alas! how shall reason draw her line on such occasions? Must not reason be dumb, and humanity mourn? But I have done. Women are *surrounded* by calamities; and nothing is left them but to bow, in submission to their woe. (I, 68-9)

Emma's solution to the dilemma is to fix on her love for Henry as the guiding principle of her conduct, and to espouse the role of the virtuous heroine who is willing to sacrifice everything in order to support her lover.

This was a universally appealing construction and it was in these terms that Emma's British experience was retailed to an American public by an enterprising printer, even before the war came to an end. Robert Bell had worked in Dublin before emigrating to Philadelphia in 1767, where he became the first publisher in America to reprint the literature of sensibility that was taking Europe by storm.<sup>29</sup> When Bell produced the first American edition of *Emma Corbett* in 1782, he removed the reference to civil war from the title and replaced it with a nostalgic allusion to Matthew Prior's well-known celebration of heroic female constancy in medieval times,

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<sup>29</sup> For further details of Bell's publishing career, see *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, ed. by Hugh Amory and David D. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 284-91.

*Henry and Emma*.<sup>30</sup> The Philadelphia edition thus announces itself, not as a potentially contentious account of *The Miseries of Civil War*, but as the romantic and affecting story of *Emma Corbett: Exhibiting Henry and Emma, the Faithful Modern Lovers*.<sup>31</sup> The work's engagement with the events of the war is no longer signalled in the title, but the content is unaltered, and, as far as I have been able to ascertain, it remains the only fictional account of the war to have been published in America before the peace treaty was signed.

Emma's pacifist sentiments are in marked contrast to the martial construction of patriotic womanhood that Pratt had promoted in his first fictional response to the American War. In *The Pupil of Pleasure* (1776), Sophia Vernon encourages her husband to return to active service on the outbreak of war, proclaiming that she cannot bear 'to see his laurels withered, by the childish and emasculating fears and delays of a wife'.<sup>32</sup> Sophia was born into a military family; her patriotism is rooted in pride at her father's martial prowess and has been strengthened by reading the exploits of heroes in Pope's translation of Homer. An admirer of classical virtues and a critic of excessive sensibility, she strongly refutes the idea that women should cultivate weakness and delicacy. Her opinion is endorsed by

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<sup>30</sup> *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, ed. by H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), I, 278-300.

<sup>31</sup> Courtney Melmoth [S. J. Pratt], *Emma Corbett: Exhibiting Henry and Emma, The Faithful Modern Lovers; As Delineated by Themselves, in Their Original Letters*, 3 vols in one (Philadelphia: Robert Bell, 1782).

<sup>32</sup> Pratt, *The Pupil of Pleasure*, II, 88.

the wider narrative, which argues that those who propagate this view of women do so in order to undermine their virtue. Sophia's active patriotism is contrasted with the self-indulgent folly of women who fall prey to the wiles of the seducer and her husband is congratulated on his possession of a wife who will 'restore the female character from the ignominy of the rest of the sex'.<sup>33</sup>

Emma rejects this classical construction of female patriotism and her decision to follow Henry to America is rooted in anxiety for his safety rather than patriotic feeling. Nevertheless, her private actions are not without political significance. As civil war destabilized the polity, the image of the devoted wife who chose to risk hardship and danger in order to stay close to her husband provided reassuring evidence of national and domestic continuity. Many details of Emma's American exploits are highly implausible, most notably the impenetrable disguise that allows her to nurse Henry back to health without his knowledge after she finds him on the battlefield.<sup>34</sup> Thematically, however, the American episodes allow Pratt to emphasize Emma's love and constancy, which reach their apotheosis in the act of sucking poison from an arrow wound, a potent symbol of female devotion widely known in eighteenth-century England through the

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<sup>33</sup> Pratt, *The Pupil of Pleasure*, II, 115.

<sup>34</sup> The implausibility persists, despite the fact that Pratt took his story from an obituary that appeared in the *Scots Magazine*, (June 1779), p. 342.

legendary story of Eleanor of Castile.<sup>35</sup> Although it lacks conviction as a narrative device, Emma's act of disguise is rich in thematic significance, highlighting the crisis of identity and allegiance precipitated by the American War. Indeed, as Dror Wahrman has observed, the anguish of Emma and Louisa, and their inability to distinguish between enemy and friend when each has a lover and brother engaged on opposite sides of the conflict, is symptomatic of the national trauma:

Whom are *we*, Louisa, to consider then as enemy, and whom as friend? WE suffer, alas! bitterly, from the contest on either side. (II, 144)

The 'unnatural confusion of fundamental identity categories' represented in the novel is symptomatic of the many ways in which prevailing ideas of selfhood and identity were tested and reshaped during the conflict.<sup>36</sup>

As Pratt was finishing his novel, another story of female heroism was also nearing completion. General Burgoyne's account of the Saratoga campaign was published in the same year as *Emma Corbett. A State of the Expedition from Canada* is clearly intended as a public narrative, designed to vindicate Burgoyne's actions and refute charges of incompetence and neglect of duty following the disastrous surrender of his army in October

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<sup>35</sup> See for example, James Thomson, *Edward and Eleonora* (London: A Millar, 1739) and the account in Charlotte Cowley's serial publication, *The Ladies History of England; From the Descent of Julius Caesar, to the Summer of 1780* (London: S Bladon, 1780-81), p. 130, which is almost contemporary with *Emma Corbett*.

<sup>36</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 223.

1777.<sup>37</sup> Amongst the material with which he sought to retrieve his reputation is a narrative that had no bearing on the military situation, but that was to furnish one of the most enduring images of the war.



*Lady Harriet Acland crossing the River Hudson*

During the retreat to Saratoga, Burgoyne gave Lady Harriet Acland permission to cross the enemy lines in order to rejoin her husband, who had been wounded and captured by the Americans during the Battle of Bemis Heights two days earlier. Lady Harriet had accompanied her husband

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<sup>37</sup> John Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition from Canada, As Laid before the House of Commons* (London: J. Almon, 1780).

throughout the campaign and her intrepid crossing of the River Hudson caught the imagination and commanded the sympathy of redcoat and rebel alike. The incident, which later became the subject of a popular engraving and is recorded in a bronze bas-relief on the Saratoga memorial, is described in a number of contemporary accounts and Burgoyne's version was reprinted in the *London Magazine* and in the *Annual Register* for 1780.<sup>38</sup> Although he expressed concern at the propriety of including 'a circumstance of private distress' in a document of public record, Burgoyne argued that Lady Harriet's story was 'too peculiar and too affecting' to be omitted from his account.<sup>39</sup> Not every one agreed with him, and one respondent complained loudly at the impropriety of 'introducing her ladyship into this controversy', arguing that the inclusion of adventures more suited to poetry, drama or romance cast doubts on the authority of Burgoyne's wider narrative.<sup>40</sup> His was a minority voice, however, and in due course Lady Harriet's story found its place in poetry, story, historical miscellany and feminist polemic, where she appears as a pattern of conjugal

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Thomas Anburey, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America: In a Series of Letters*, 2 vols (London: W. Lane, 1789), I, 455-7; Marvin L. Brown, Jr., *Baroness von Riedesel and the American Revolution: Journal and Correspondence of a Tour of Duty 1776-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 52; R. Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences during the Late American War, from its Commencement to the Year 1783* (Dublin: Wilkinson and Courtney, 1809), p. 196; *London Magazine*, 49 (1780); *Annual Register* (1780), 'Characters', pp. 63-6.

<sup>39</sup> Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition*, p. 127.

<sup>40</sup> *Remarks on General Burgoyne's State of the Expedition from Canada* (London: G. Wilkie, 1780), p. 8.

tenderness and patriotic virtue, 'prais'd by the brave, and honour'd by the fair'.<sup>41</sup>

The fictional story of Emma Corbett, like the true history of Harriet Acland, celebrates a specifically female construction of patriotism. Unconventional in their determination to brave the horrors of war, both heroines remain entirely conventional in drawing on domestic female virtues to guide their conduct. Yet their private stories are also imbued with public significance, as their courage and devotion transform a history of military defeat and humiliation into a narrative of triumphant virtue. When Emma's brief marriage to Henry terminates with his sudden death, Emma returns to England to give birth to a daughter before finally succumbing to the effects of the poison that she has imbibed. Although Henry, Emma, Edward and Louisa all perish, the novel ends on a positive note, with the information that Emma and Louisa's orphan children are both flourishing under Raymond's unrelenting care. One generation has been destroyed by the conflict, but a new Emma and Edward promise hope for the future. The cautionary message that underpins this promise is that renewal is contingent on the rejection of a Patriot ideology that is contrary to private morality and public interest.

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<sup>41</sup> John Roberts, *The Belloniad* (London: printed for the author, 1785), p. 182. See also *The Masquerade, A Collection of New Enigmas, Logographs, Charades, Rebuses, Queries and Transpositions* (Dublin: P Wogan, 1800), p. 33; Henry Lemoine, *The Kentish Curate; or, The History of Lamuel Lyttleton, a Foundling*, 4 vols (London: J. Parsons, 1786), IV, 74-82; Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), ed. by Sharon M. Setzer (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), pp. 60-4.

## Chapter 2: The Discourse of Patriotism (2)

### *Reveries of the Heart* (1781)

A year after *Emma Corbett* was published, the anonymous author of *Reveries of the Heart; During a Tour through Part of England and France. In a Series of Letters to a Friend* gave an account of the war that reflects a very different ideological perspective. *Reveries of the Heart* is deeply rooted in the Country Party ideology that inspired Charles Corbett, and its unequivocal endorsement of Patriot politics is diametrically opposed to the adverse critique presented in Pratt's novel. The work's main protagonist is a narrator who declares himself to be a friend of James Barry and who shares the painter's anxiety about the imminent extinction of Britain's political freedom. In the course of the novel he articulates many of the arguments that Country Party adherents advanced to support their criticisms of the war and mounts a sustained attack on the conduct of the British army in North America, in which the depravity and inhumanity of the professional British soldier is contrasted with the civic virtue of the American militiaman who takes up arms in defence of liberty and property. He attacks the Court, complains about the growth of patronage, and charges the ministry with



incompetence and corruption. Some of these themes will be dramatized and debated in other novels in this study, and all were fundamental Country Party beliefs.

*Reveries of the Heart* appeared in the spring of 1781, and it is perhaps not surprising that a degree of war weariness is detectable both in the work itself and in the reviews that greeted it. After six years of fighting, the American crisis remained unresolved and the military conflict had escalated into a global war. During the previous summer, General Rochambeau's French troops had landed on Long Island and London had been convulsed by the Gordon Riots. When *Reveries of the Heart* was published the prevailing mood in Britain was one of disillusion and dismay. The author's overt engagement with the politics of the war was an object of controversy from the outset. Although he conceals his name he displays no such reticence about his opinions, and the American War is repeatedly paraded within the text as a sign of the decline of civic virtue and the corruption of the British polity. The *Monthly Review* recognized the work as an 'agreeable Medley' and praised its 'lively vein of Shandean hilarity', but disapproved of the author's 'tedious repetitions of national grievances'.<sup>1</sup> The *Critical Review* was more censorious. Its reviewer commented that the title aroused expectations of a work that would consist of 'grave reflections on men and manners, or some humorous strictures on fashionable vices and

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<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Review*, 66 (1782), p. 238.

foibles', and that he was therefore disagreeably surprised to discover that 'this vehicle, in the shape and appearance of a novel, was only made use of, by a verbose and violent patriot, to convey to the world his political sentiments on the present state of our public affairs'.<sup>2</sup>

The contrast between *Reveries of the Heart* and *Emma Corbett* is not solely a matter of political ideology. Although both works are epistolary in form and sentimental in tone, they represent two very different literary traditions. Whilst Pratt's three volume novel is a conventional eighteenth-century tale of courtship and marriage, the two volumes of letters that make up *Reveries of the Heart* purport to be the reflections of a recovering invalid as he travels through Yorkshire and Lancashire in the early months of 1779. The eccentric, digressive and self-conscious nature of the writing situates the work firmly and deliberately in the tradition of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and the myriad imitations that followed in its wake during a period in which the public appetite for such 'sentimental' travel narratives appears to have been insatiable.<sup>3</sup> In identifying itself as part of this literary sub-genre, *Reveries of the Heart* not only chooses to occupy the uncertain position between fact and fiction in which these works were sited, but, in

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<sup>2</sup> *Critical Review*, 51 (1781), 351-4 (pp. 351-2).

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the popularity of the sentimental travelogue in the late eighteenth century, see J. C. T. Oates, *Shandyism and Sentiment 1760-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Bibliographical Society, 1968).

typical Sternean fashion, sets out to exploit that ambiguity in its engagement with the reader.

The metanarrative of the journey provides a fictional framework for a series of essays on the follies of the age. Like Sterne, the author of *Reveries of the Heart* adopts a disconnected and associative structure for his fiction and the narrator's reflections and observations are loosely linked to accounts of the people he meets, the places he visits and the events he witnesses. We know little about the writer, or the companion who intermittently shares his journey, or the friend in London to whom the letters are addressed and who will eventually publish the correspondence, except that all three are male, of indeterminate age but some experience of life, and united in their opposition to the war. They also share an admiration for the satirical humour and sentimental philosophy of Rabelais, Cervantes and Sterne. The topics of discussion, which are largely conventional, include the vagaries of fashion, the merits of inoculation, the pleasures and pains of love, the rural obsession with fox hunting, the hypocrisy of Methodists, the unreliability of travel writers and the corrupt nature of contemporary British politics, and they are all presented in an apparently haphazard manner that alternates unpredictably between the sentimental and the satirical.

As the early reviewers noted with some asperity, the resulting juxtapositions often appear discordant. However, the arbitrary organization

and abrupt changes of mood that characterize the work are not without significance. Sentimental anecdotes reveal the evanescent nature of human relationships, proclaiming their susceptibility to change and their vulnerability to the ever present threats of deceit and death, whilst the satirical outbursts expose the corruption of the modern polity and lament the extinction of public virtues that flourished in earlier times. The dissonance of the juxtapositions is dissolved by a recognition that they are, in effect, different manifestations of the same malaise. The sentimental reflections and political invective both evoke a sharp awareness of the fleeting nature of human experience and the futility of worldly values. As the choice of title indicates, neither sentimental musings nor political diatribes carry any expectation of reform. They are ‘reveries’, and their ‘fantastic, fanciful, unpractical’ nature reflects the author’s understanding of the underlying precariousness of the human condition and his pessimistic view of the current state of the British polity.<sup>4</sup>

In the role of sentimental traveller, the narrator can wander where fancy directs:

My friend and I have agreed to travel together; but it is to be after our own manner; each one following his own inclinations and pursuits, without being any incumbrance to the other; so that having different acquaintances to call upon, we shall be often asunder. As I hate the minutiae of modern travellers and story-tellers, you will find it

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<sup>4</sup> *OED*.

necessary to keep this in mind ... We intend to go sometimes in the diligences, sometimes in chaises; in short, just as whim leads us.<sup>5</sup>

This genial explanation is a coded instruction to the reader, highlighting the metonymic relationship between the spontaneous and digressive nature of the narrator's travels and the diffuse and disconnected musings that they inspire. The writer's rejection of the 'minutiae' of the modern travelogue signals the fictitious nature of his account, whilst his declaration that he intends to alternate between public and private modes of transport prepares the reader to expect sociable encounters with fellow travellers as well as intimate conversations between himself and his companion. This suggests that the work will oscillate between public and private discourse in ways that readers (and reviewers) may find disconcerting.

In modelling his work on that of Sterne and other 'sentimental travellers', the author anticipates a reader adept in the art of literary discrimination. Indeed such is his confidence, that the *Dedication*, addressed to the shades of Democritus, Rabelais, Servantes [sic] and Sterne, is deferred until the final pages of the second volume, when the reader's engagement with the book is already drawing to a close. The provision of a respectable and recognizable literary pedigree not only imposes a degree of retrospective unity on a loosely structured work, but also assumes a highly developed set of reader expectations. The slightness of the novel's fictional

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<sup>5</sup> *Reveries of the Heart; During a Tour through Part of England and France. In a Series of Letters to a Friend*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1781), I, 8-9. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

framework and the topical nature of its political commentary preclude any prolonged suspension of disbelief, and the reader's attention is constantly drawn both to the artificiality of the work's form and to the pervasive factuality of much of its content. This is undoubtedly disconcerting to modern sensibilities and it is perhaps not surprising that James Raven and Antonia Forster exclude the work from their comprehensive survey of late eighteenth-century English novels, relegating it to the category of 'Selected non-fiction associated with the novels'.<sup>6</sup>

Eighteenth-century readers, on the other hand, were apparently happy to read the work as a novel. The loose, inclusive fictional form situated somewhere between fact and fiction was one with which they were familiar, and they had developed sophisticated techniques for discriminating between different types of narrative discourse.<sup>7</sup> In the case of travelogues, uncertainty was endemic to the genre, and Percy Adams and Charles Batten have shown how writers and readers negotiated a wide range of narratives that mingle factual and fictional elements in varying proportions.<sup>8</sup> It is noticeable that the first reviewers of *Reveries of the Heart* have no problem in identifying the work as a novel; what makes them uneasy is the partisan

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<sup>6</sup> James Raven and Antonia Forster, *The English Novel 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 818.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive account of this process, see Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars 1600-1800* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962); Charles L. Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

nature of the author's political commentary. Their objection is not to the factual nature of his subject matter, but to its party bias and lack of originality.

Since those early reviews, *Reveries of the Heart* has been largely overlooked. The work was known to Heilman, however, who notes its satirical attack on the British army and members of the administration and concludes, correctly, that the author was more interested in Britain than in America:

What he is distressed and angered by is the follies of governors and governed, the maladministration and the credulity, the ignorance and blindness and deceit that replace a rational understanding of and sensible conduct of events.<sup>9</sup>

He is perhaps less correct in his assumption that the work reveals no fundamental sympathy for the American cause.<sup>10</sup> Like his friend, James Barry, the author of *Reveries of the Heart* celebrates the birth of the new American republic by contrasting its virtue and liberty with the extinction of the same values in Britain. The remainder of this chapter will show how his response to the war falls into three broad categories. Like many members of the opposition, *Reveries of the Heart* argues the need for constitutional reform, mounts a sustained attack on Lord North's ministry for its conduct

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<sup>9</sup> Heilman, *America in English Fiction*, p. 248.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

of the war, and celebrates those who resisted ministerial policies in the name of a Country Party ideology that the author clearly shares.

### *Country Party Politics*

The narrow focus of the writer's political concerns is reflected, with a degree of self-conscious humour, in the limited compass of his travels. Despite the title's suggestion of an extensive itinerary that will take the traveller through 'part of England and France', his tour is in fact confined to a small area of Yorkshire (York, Tadcaster, Leeds, Bradford, Halifax) and Lancashire (Rochdale and Manchester) in which some residue of the social and political virtues that he espouses has been preserved. Here, far from the contaminating influence of the metropolis and the court, the writer finds evidence of the benevolent sociability that is equally the hallmark of the virtuous state and the virtuous man, and which he celebrates in the figure of Thomas Duncombe, the High Sheriff of Yorkshire (I, 101-2). Duncombe's character is a compendium of Country Party virtues. His generous hospitality is a sign of the true sociability so highly valued in sentimental ideology, but it also celebrates the relationship between landlord and tenant that guarantees the independence of the country landowner, enabling him to resist the encroaching powers of the monarch and safeguard the liberties of the people. Independent country landowners were the bedrock of the Country Party, and, in the 1780s, the brief flowering of the Association



Movement gave a new urgency to their political agenda. It is against this topical background that *Reveries of the Heart* can best be understood.

#### i) *Reforming the Constitution*

Country Party patriots were loyal to the constitution rather than to the Crown. From their point of view, the handling of the American crisis in the 1760s and 1770s showed that ancient British liberties were once again under threat, not from the royal prerogative but from the corrupting effects of patronage and the maintenance of a professional army. Christopher Wyvill's Association Movement was formed to counter that threat. It began with a meeting held in the assembly rooms in York on 30 December 1779, at which more than 600 Yorkshire landowners agreed to petition the government for reductions in public spending. The occasion was widely reported in the press and also commemorated in a popular print.<sup>11</sup> Within a few weeks, Wyvill and his supporters had launched a Yorkshire Association to work for economic and electoral reform and were encouraging the formation of similar associations in other counties and boroughs.<sup>12</sup> Their objectives included the reorganization of electoral constituencies, the establishment of triennial parliaments and reform of the franchise. It is no

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Laurie, *The Association Meeting at York* (BM Satires 5657, April 1780).

<sup>12</sup> Ian R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform: The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics 1760-1785* (London: Macmillan, 1962); H. T. Dickinson, 'Radicals and Reformers in the Age of Wilkes and Wyvill', in *British Politics and Society from Walpole to Pitt 1742-1789*, ed. by Jeremy Black (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 147-75.

coincidence that the narrator of *Reveries of the Heart* begins his account in York, and contemporary readers would have been sensitive to the political significance of his itinerary.

In April 1780 (a year after the events that are described in *Reveries of the Heart*, but several months before its publication) John Dunning's motion that 'the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished' was carried in the House of Commons by 233 votes to 215, and enthusiasm for reform ran high. The anger, regret and cynicism that pervade *Reveries of the Heart* may reflect Country Party disappointment with the results of the General Election held later that year. Despite a large reduction in their majority, North and his allies were returned to power and several prominent opposition figures, including Admiral Keppel and Edmund Burke, lost their seats.<sup>16</sup> The narrator conveys the administration's contempt for the Association Movement and the constitutional reforms that it sought to promote by imagining Lord North's contemptuous response to their demands:

You entrusted this empire to my care, when at peace, and united in all its parts; I have effected a total separation of a large portion of it, and brought you into the most disastrous dangerous civil war ... I have conquered your struggles for the constitution ... I have borrowed money on the worst of terms, purely to bribe my wretched tools in the

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<sup>16</sup> Ian R. Christie, *The End of North's Ministry 1780-82* (London: Macmillan, 1958); Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence*, pp. 305-6; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 554.

house of commons ...by my total and professed want of abilities, I have brought you to your present condition; therefore ... suffer me to go on until the property of the whole nation is got into the pockets of my dapper contractors and dependants; I shall then laugh at your landed interest, with their foolish petitions and remonstrances. (I, 115-8)

Like the associators, *Reveries of the Heart* argues that the corruption of the polity, over which the administration continued to preside and which was most strikingly apparent in the perpetuation of the American War, heralds a return to absolutism. In a letter dated from Bramham-Moor, but which appears to refer to the nearby civil war battlefield of Marston Moor, the narrator records that his enthusiastic celebration of the place that saw the total overthrow of the 'despotic principles of the Stuarts' was dismissed by his travelling companion as premature. His friend reminded him that tyrannical practices still survived, 'reproduced under the sanction of a family called to the throne expressly to exclude them' (I, 119) and later confided his suspicion that 'the royal summer sun of the Stuart line, [is] now in truth only arrived at its meridian' (II, 82).

One of the travellers that the narrator meets on his journey is a native of Germany, who speaks of the British constitution in glowing terms. He proclaims himself an admirer of the Swiss political philosopher, De Lolme, who had recently proclaimed the British constitution to be 'the best ... ever framed' (II, 167). De Lolme's treatise on political liberty had extolled the virtues of balanced government, representative democracy and

the separation of powers, all of which he believed to be enshrined in the British Constitution.<sup>17</sup> The narrator takes advantage of the German traveller's naïve enthusiasm to expose a number of weaknesses in the system of parliamentary representation which De Lolme had overlooked, inequalities that the traditional landowning elite of the Association Movement and the urban radicals of the Society for Constitutional Information were equally anxious to rectify.

ii) *Attacking The Ministry*

The satirical representation of Lord North is one of a large number of vituperative *ad hominem* attacks on members of the administration that are scattered throughout the novel. For the narrator and his friends, the American War is merely the latest and most potent example of the corruption of the polity, and its primary function within the text is to provide an inexhaustible supply of ammunition with which to attack the king and his administration:

Consider whom we have to guide it [the war], a king so redoubtable in valour, that when his verriest enemies durst not put his prowess to the proof, was so fond of fame, as to go to war with his own subjects, that he might not be without a title to the laurel crown ... a prime minister, a man who conducts affairs with equal propriety and success, whether he sleeps in the house of commons, or wakes to compliment his

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<sup>17</sup> Jean Louis de Lolme, *The Constitution of England; Or, An Account of the English Government* (London: G. Kearsley, 1775).

friends with contracts, or his own family with the most valuable places. A secretary of war, who never served a day of a campaign, and a first lord of the admiralty who never was at sea. (I, 169-70)

Although such techniques have a long literary history, *Reveries of the Heart* is unique amongst the works in this study in its use of satirical caricature to denigrate prominent public figures, and the unease expressed by the reviewers at the inclusion of this material reveals considerable anxiety about its propriety.<sup>18</sup> Even within literary genres that could boast a rich tradition of satirical invective, the undisguised *ad hominem* attack had to be handled with care. Despite the robustness of his own practice, Dryden had acknowledged the literary lampoon as a morally dangerous weapon and questioned the right of the satirist to impugn the reputation of others unless the public interest rendered it ‘an Action of Virtue to make Examples of vicious Men’.<sup>19</sup> The growing respectability of the novel rested largely on its capacity to entertain and instruct an audience that was widely assumed to be predominantly young and female, but the vituperative political rhetoric that abounds in *Reveries of the Heart* is clearly addressed to a very different constituency. On page after page, leading members of the administration are branded as dishonest, cowardly, corrupt and vicious, and by dint of constant repetition their names are rendered so completely synonymous with the

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<sup>18</sup> Another novel that satirizes prominent political personages is Charles Johnstone, *Chrysal; or, The Adventures of a Guinea* (1760-5), ed. by E. A. Baker (London: Routledge, 1907).

<sup>19</sup> John Dryden, ‘Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire’ (1693), in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenberg and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-2000), IV (1974), p. 60.

vices they are deemed to exemplify that the attribution of virtue becomes highly ironized:

Want of memory and understanding, 'tis that alone can save old  
England at present; 'tis that alone can fit a man for being a true  
subject of George the Third: Lord North's truth, Lord Germaine's  
courage, Lord Mansfield's justice, and Lord Sandwich's chastity, are  
now the only watch-words of office. (I, 159)

This sledgehammer irony – where what is said is the direct opposite of what is meant – is the writer's weapon of choice. His repeated inversions of reality are a way of reinforcing his view that when vice is more highly esteemed than virtue, then the world has been turned upside down.

iii) *Patriot Icons: Keppel, Effingham, and 'my friend Will'*

*Reveries of the Heart* is vehement in its opposition to the war, but is unusual in the extent to which the author focuses his antagonism and disapproval through an impassioned commentary on real-life figures and political *causes célèbres*. Like many members of the opposition, the novel's protagonists look back nostalgically at the Seven Years War, when Britons and Americans fought side by side against the French and Wolfe's capture of Quebec was celebrated by an enthusiastic nation. Opponents of the American War found few opportunities for patriotic euphoria in the years

between 1775 and 1783, although a number of senior officers were warmly applauded when they refused to serve against their fellow subjects in the colonies.<sup>20</sup> Foremost amongst them were Admiral Keppel and Lord Effingham, both of whom are portrayed in *Reveries of the Heart* as paradigms of public virtue.

As far as the parliamentary opposition was concerned, Keppel's court-martial in February 1779 was possibly the most dramatic event of the war, providing them with an unparalleled opportunity to combine a political attack on the government with a popular display of patriotic allegiance. Although Keppel had refused to fight against the Americans, he agreed to take command of the Channel Fleet when France joined the war and Britain became a target for invasion. In July 1778, his ships engaged with a French naval force off the coast of Ushant. The battle was indecisive, with considerable losses on both sides, but Keppel retained control of the Channel and therefore claimed the victory. After the fleet returned to port in October, the opposition press accused Keppel's second-in-command, Sir Hugh Palliser, who was closely connected to members of the administration, of failing to respond to Keppel's signal to re-engage with the enemy. When Keppel declined to publish a letter in support of his subordinate, Palliser

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<sup>20</sup> See pp. 25-6.

retaliated by demanding that Keppel be court-martialled for misconduct and neglect of duty.<sup>21</sup>

Owing to Keppel's poor health, the trial took place in Portsmouth rather than on a naval flagship. Many senior opposition figures, including Rockingham, Portland and Effingham, took up residence in the town, and nightly processions, illuminations and bonfires were organized in Keppel's support. The admiral's position was certainly precarious. Failure to do one's utmost against the enemy was a capital offence in the naval code of conduct, as Keppel knew only too well, having served on the court-martial for Admiral Byng, who had been found guilty and shot after losing the Battle of Minorca in 1757. His eventual acquittal was the occasion for uninhibited rejoicing and its significance is marked at the beginning of *Reveries of the Heart* when the writer and his friend arrive in York just as 'the honest men of the nation were demonstrating a ridiculous joy for the delivery of admiral Keppel' (I, 10). The narrator declares that he:

never saw more heart-felt rejoicing than there was on the occasion,  
and the unanimity was not amiss, there being but three dissentient  
voices in the whole city. (I, 11)

Kathleen Wilson argues that, for opposition supporters, the Keppel affair restored confidence in Britain's libertarian institutions and in the navy as a

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<sup>21</sup> A detailed account of the quarrel between Keppel and Palliser is given by J. H. Broomfield, 'The Keppel-Palliser Affair 1778-1779', *Mariner's Mirror: The Journal of the Society for Nautical Research*, 47 (1961), 195-207. See also Piers Mackesy, *The War for America 1775-1783* (London: Longman, 1984), pp. 202-11 and 239-45.



bulwark of British freedom. She also notes that, according to a report in the *York Courant* of 28 February 1779, the celebrations in the city were tinged with a degree of ‘nostalgia, loss and desire’, and terminated with a toast recalling the glories of an earlier North American war: ‘May Great Britain never want a Keppel as an Admiral, a Wolfe as a General, and a Chatham as a Minister’.<sup>22</sup> These are sentiments that the narrator of *Reveries of the Heart* frequently reiterates. However, his account of the celebrations concludes with a less nostalgic but more humorous – and more radical – salutation:

I made a shift to see the illuminations, and afterwards went to the tavern, where a vast concourse of gentlemen attended on the occasion. Here my friend had an opportunity of toasting his favourite memories of Joshua and Elijah; one of whom put to death thirty-one kings, and the other eight hundred and twenty priests. — hurra! hurra! (I, 11-12)

Both Wilson and Mackesy describe how Keppel’s acquittal released a surge of anti-administration feeling amongst a range of political constituencies, within and outside parliament, and those liberating moments are captured in this account.<sup>23</sup>

Effingham’s refusal to fight against the colonists had been widely admired in opposition circles, where his decision to resign his army commission was invested with huge public significance. In *Reveries of the Heart* he is eulogized as a man who had placed the national interest above the personal whims of the monarch and the opportunity for financial gain:

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 258.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 256-9; Mackesy, *The War for America*, pp. 242-3.

To the immortal honour of our country, in one hundred thousand well paid troops, there is one at present, who rather than be in a passion, because his prince is so, and commands him to go three thousand miles, and assist in scalping, tomohawking, and slaughtering man, woman, and child ... has thrown up the emoluments of his commission; aye, and even his share of American plunder, which at a time that all is dedicated to legal plunder is, let me tell you, no inconsiderable object. (I, 26-7)

Although Effingham's action is an indication that civic virtue still exists, both the singularity of his protest (one in a hundred thousand) and the circumstances which provoke it (a war of private passion rather than public necessity) signal the extent to which the polity has been corrupted. His conduct is held up as a standard against which the actions of the British army in North America, and of those who directed its activities, can be measured and found wanting. Thus, in the same sentence, we find the commendation of Effingham coupled with an attack on the British use of Indian warriors and a denunciation of the administration's complicity with methods of warfare that were branded as savage and indiscriminate by opposition spokesmen.<sup>24</sup>

Behind the narrator's passionate anti-militarism lies the civic humanist conviction that a professional army is an incontrovertible indicator of the decay of public virtue within the state, and it is in the light of this axiom that we should understand his depiction of a British army composed

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<sup>24</sup> The controversy surrounding Britain's Indian alliances is considered in more detail in Chapter Six.

of professional soldiers and common criminals. A citizen army, or militia, taking up arms in defence of the common good, is the sign of a virtuous polity, whereas the use of professional soldiers and hired mercenaries who have no civic stake in the outcome of military action is a sign of corruption, and opens the doors to tyranny.<sup>25</sup> After describing how the army is ‘made up of highway robbers, house-breakers, shop-lifters, swindlers, pick-pockets, thieves, and vagabonds’ he goes on to praise them as:

The most gallant, brave, and humane army that ever marched to burn peaceful villages, plunder equally friend and enemy, and tomohawk, scalp, or bayonet promiscuously man, woman, and child. (I, 174)

The narrator’s contention that the rank and file of the British army in North America was composed entirely of criminals and vagrants is clearly an exaggeration. The Recruiting Acts of 1778 and 1779 certainly made provision for the compulsory enlistment of paupers, and offered conditional pardons to certain classes of criminal who agreed to join the army, but in practice potential candidates were usually regarded as unsuitable and the numbers conscripted in this way appear to have been negligible.<sup>26</sup> However, although the practice may not have been widespread, it provides valuable ammunition for a satirical attack on modern military standards.

The moral and political dangers inherent in the professionalization of the army are epitomized in the unconditional obedience exacted by a

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<sup>25</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence*, p. 33.

military oath that signifies an abdication of both civic responsibility and common humanity. From being a virtuous citizen who resorts to arms solely in defence of *res publica*, the modern soldier begins his military career with a solemn oath ‘to cut the throat of every man he is ordered ... to murder’, and then spends months learning ‘the mechanical art of taking lives’ (II, 147). By these measures men are transformed into:

Those execrable machines called common soldiers; whom we construct with musquets, bayonets, red coats, fierce cocked hats, and high sounding words; wind up with wine or spirituous liquors; and set a-going down the great direct infernal high road, with drums, trumpets, and artillery. (I, 33)

Nor is it only the rank and file who display a total disregard for humanity. Drawing on the details of a recent *cause célèbre*, the narrator recounts his meeting with a senior officer who boasted of ‘having put to death a number of persons unarmed, unresisting, and even on their knees begging for mercy’ (I, 31). The allusion is to Baylor’s Massacre, an incident that took place during the skirmishing and provisioning around New York in September 1778, in which a detachment of the British Light Infantry commanded by General Grey refused to give quarter to American troops.<sup>27</sup> The incident was widely reported, both in the colonies and in Britain, where it provided Country Party supporters with an ominous warning of the barbarity to be expected from an army of professionals.

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<sup>27</sup> Hugh Bicheno, *Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolutionary War* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), p. 120.

To counter this representation of military brutality, the author offers an opposing construction of martial integrity. Drawing on the conventional sentimental figure of the veteran soldier, whom we have already seen in *Emma Corbett* and who will feature in a number of other novels in this study, the narrator offers nostalgic memories of his friend Will as proof that a military career is not necessarily incompatible with civic virtue:

Death has torn from me my beloved friend, every action of whose life convinced me that he only took up arms to defend the weak from rapine, murder, and violation. With what pleasure did he dedicate his attention to soften the unavoidable rigours of war, even to the invaders of his country, pouring balm into his wounds and relieving their wants to the extremity of his fortune. (I, 28-9)

Despite the evidence of recent events, the narrator confesses that his youthful association with this beloved friend has left him with a propensity to ‘look at a soldier with pleasure, as a blessing to the community’ (I, 30). Characterized by patriotism, benevolence and philanthropy, and engaged in campaigns that are defensive and therefore morally permissible, Will is an unambiguous indictment of the modern professional soldier. In a tone of bitter irony, the narrator describes his friend’s service in America during the Seven Years War, recalling the ‘extraordinary instances of kindness, and more than Hibernian hospitality’ with which Will and his companions were treated as they risked their lives in defence of the colonists whom the British army and their mercenary allies are now so anxious to slaughter (I, 29).

The strain of sentimental nostalgia that characterizes the narrator's reminiscences of his friendship with Will supports an idealized view of a British past that throws the present state of the nation into sharp relief. In pursuit of a more virtuous polity, *Reveries of the Heart* casts a wistful look backwards to some unspecified era when:

Englishmen had some passions, and were not the poor time-serving spiritless dependants on a court, that we now see every where cringing to their superiors, treating their enemies with disrespect, their prisoners with inhumanity, and their inferiors in wealth with insolence and contempt. (I, 151)

The novel uses the American War to show how far Britain has fallen short of the civic humanist ideal of the virtuous state. With some trepidation, the narrator anticipates the imminent arrival of 'every loyalist in America' who rushes to leave his native country and 'loudly proclaims by oaths and addresses what he will do in England' (I, 171). That such boastful and cowardly adventurers will find themselves at home in the England of George III is not in doubt. That they will contribute to an increase in public virtue is, however, most unlikely, as *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee* (1787) will demonstrate only too clearly. However, before making Jonathan's acquaintance, it will first be necessary to explore the ways in which the American War is represented in the early novels of Robert Bage.



### Chapter 3: The Discourse of Liberty (1)

#### *Mount Henneth* (1782)

Robert Bage's first novel, *Mount Henneth*, engages with a discourse of liberty and virtue that is both more restrained and more wide-ranging than the discourse of patriotism that characterizes *Emma Corbett* and *Reveries of the Heart*. Bage echoes many of the Country Party criticisms of the conflict with America expressed in *Reveries of the Heart*, but *Mount Henneth's* light-hearted tone and complex narrative structure combine to fashion an account that is considerably more nuanced than previous representations. Bage's characteristic blend of genial humour, sentimental romance and philosophical reflection is deployed to foster a radical understanding of liberty that encompasses independence of thought and economic self-sufficiency as well as the political freedom enshrined in the constitution.

The novel opens in the summer of 1778 and spans a period of about two years, during which it records the impact of the American War on a broad cross-section of British society. It is a diffuse and complex epistolary fiction with a large cast of characters, whose adventures range across a geopolitical landscape that includes America, Britain, Holland, France, Spain,



South Africa, Persia and India. Early reviewers greeted the new author with enthusiasm. The *Critical Review* commended the novel's 'strokes of vivacity and wit' and its tendency to 'promote virtue', whilst the *Monthly Review* praised the 'sensible and ingenious Author' for his 'judicious reflections' and 'pleasing and interesting characters'.<sup>1</sup> More recent commentators have tended to read *Mount Henneth* in the light of Bage's later reputation as a Jacobin novelist, scanning it for evidence to endorse or refute his radical credentials.<sup>2</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, the novel's engagement with the American War has featured only tangentially in these accounts, and the richness and complexity of its response remain unexplored.

*Mount Henneth*'s four interwoven courtship narratives act as the framework for an incisive, but good-humoured, critique of contemporary British society. Although the novel lacks the breadth of an omniscient narrative such as *Tom Jones*, its large cast of characters is structured to suggest the complexity and variety of social relationships in eighteenth-century Britain. A wide circle of correspondents (twelve in total) extends

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<sup>1</sup> *Critical Review*, 54 (1782), 152; *Monthly Review*, 66 (1782), 129-31 (p. 130).

<sup>2</sup> Arguments that broadly defend the radical nature of Bage's fiction are advanced by Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*; Peter Faulkner, *Robert Bage* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979) and Laurie Fitzgerald, *Shifting Genres, Changing Realities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). Those who are less convinced include K. G. Hall, *The Exalted Heroine and the Triumph of Order* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Ruth Perry, 'Bluestockings in Utopia', in *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 159-78; London, *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*, pp. 141-53 and Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 73-8.

the novel's range, which is further enlarged by a wealth of interpolated narratives and anecdotes. *Mount Henneth* does not simply depict members of different social ranks – aristocrats, landowners, merchants, speculators, professionals, artisans and labourers all feature within its pages – it also recognizes and celebrates regional and cultural diversity. Visits to Henneth Castle and Caradoc Hall bring the protagonists into contact with a wide cross-section of Welsh society, whilst their acquaintance with Dr Gordon exposes them to the quirks of an expatriate Scot who exploits stereotypical images of his nation in order to distract and amuse his patients. As they describe these encounters, or retell the story of James Foston's adventures in India and the Melton family history in America, the letter-writers in *Mount Henneth* provide their readers, both within the novel and in the real world, with a comprehensive account of a dynamic bourgeois society. Through the interweaving of multiple narratives and the proliferation of viewpoints, Bage argues that society works best when it is shaped by communitarian rather than competitive values. Even as he satirizes the imperfections of the world around him, he finds grounds for optimism in the operation of sentimental sociability, affective sympathy and commercial endeavour, and these values form the basis of the utopian society that Foston establishes at Henneth Castle.

Foston's bourgeois utopia is characterized by a felicitous combination of commercial, communitarian and affective values that

promise freedom from oppression to all its inhabitants. Significantly excluded from the utopian world, however, are members of the political class, whose ideology and interests are depicted as inimical to the harmony and inclusivity of society as a whole. The social and political elite are represented in the novel by the Caradocs and the Stanleys, who value rank and money above virtue and sensibility, and by Sir Howell Henneth, whose neglected estate Foston purchases on his return from India. Sir Howell's road to ruin has followed a conventional trajectory that began with fashion and pleasure and ended with gambling, electioneering and a retreat to his ancestral home at Henneth Castle, where he spent his final years in misanthropic isolation and the miserly accumulation of capital. Foston's purchase of the estate unlocks the economic and human potential that Sir Howell had stifled and allows the benefits to cascade downwards through all levels of society.

The utopian community at Henneth Castle is designed both to remedy the faults of a society whose decline is made manifest by its descent into civil war, and to counter the pessimism of Pratt's *Shenstone-Green* (1779), which is a satire on the folly of misconceived and misdirected benevolence.<sup>3</sup> Pratt's novel features a well-intentioned philanthropist, Sir Benjamin Beauchamp, who makes the residents of his utopia financially independent and is then shocked by their licentious and disputatious

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<sup>3</sup> S. J. Pratt, *Shenstone-Green; or, The New Paradise Lost* (London: R. Baldwin, 1779).

behaviour. Foston refuses to be deterred from his utopian plans by Sir Benjamin's misfortunes, which he ascribes to a careless choice of inhabitants:

I shall hope to see you at the castle of Henneth; where, though I do not intend to follow the example of Sir Benjamin Beauchamp, in the peopling his Shenston-Green, I do hope to form a neighbourhood, of the worthy and the good.<sup>4</sup>

The future residents of Mount Henneth are selected on the basis of their tolerance, good humour and sensibility. Those who are tyrannical or unfeeling are excluded, and the chosen few form a community that is industrious, enterprising, commercial and prosperous, a utopian antithesis to the divided and war-weary nation they leave behind.

Bage's novel draws on a rich stock of fictional material to launch an attack on tyranny and injustice in both public and private life. Despite their apparently haphazard nature, the novel's multiple narratives are thematically linked, exploring the rival claims of liberty and authority against the background of a divisive war that had brought such issues to the fore. Bage is radical in his condemnation of all forms of tyranny, but declines to sanction overt rebellion. Instead, he advocates the resolution of conflict through diplomacy and conciliation. To this end, the novel is filled with stories and anecdotes showing that confrontation and combat are counter-

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth*, 2 vols (London: T. Lowndes, 1782; repr. New York: Garland, 1979), I, 67-8. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

productive, and that disputes of all kinds, whether political or familial, can only be solved through rational discourse and a tolerant understanding. This enlightened view pervades the novel's many narratives, and its relevance to the continuing quarrel between Britain and her recalcitrant colonies is clear. Bage's representation of the conflict is structured to support this central thesis. *Mount Henneth* engages with the American War in three distinct ways: it provides an intermittent commentary on the economic impact of the war in Britain; it reproduces the eye-witness account of a common British soldier who served in America; and it relates a sentimental story of virtue in distress that centres on the experiences of two Americans held in British captivity. These disparate experiences combine to portray the conflict as an act of folly, which brings power and wealth to the unscrupulous few but pain and hardship to the majority.

#### *The Economic Impact of the War*

Through its diffuse and complex heteroglossic structure, *Mount Henneth* offers a critique that recognizes the American War as an economic, as well as a cultural and political event, and records its impact on a variety of people from a range of social classes. Although the armed conflict takes place largely offstage, its repercussions are omnipresent and affect people

from all walks of life. Landowners such as John Cheslyn find that ‘the taxes which fashion and administration unite to load us with, are so grievous that a country gentleman out of debt begins to be a phaenomenon’ (I, 28), whilst the disruption to transatlantic trade is fatal to those, like his brother Henry, whose livelihoods depend upon it:

Every one knows to his sorrow the events that distinguished this fatal year; every one feels the wound given to this country, by its breach with the colonies. Mr Henry’s house struggled with its adverse situation near three years, but was obliged to stop payment in January last, and became bankrupt in March. (I, 13)

Henry is rescued from poverty by a gift from his brother, but the sufferings of those who had no friends or family to assist them were acute. Amongst the recipients of Foston’s charity are the wives and families of soldiers who have been killed in the war, or who are incarcerated in French and Spanish prisons. While on a visit to Plymouth, Foston describes the intrigues with the female sex which have been occupying his time:

My principal beauty ... is a fair maid just nine months gone with child; her husband, a sailor, left her two months since with five and twenty splendid shillings in her pocket, and a promise to return in six weeks with a sack of Spanish piastres. The poor fellow is now sunning himself in a dungeon at Havre-de-grace. (II, 287)

By playfully casting himself in the role of the benefactor whose activities are assumed to be sexually motivated, Foston not only exposes a society lacking the charity and benevolence that it claims to admire, but also shows

how far his own generosity exceeds conventional boundaries. He confesses to his friends that he has been ‘squandering’ his daughter’s inheritance:

upon a score of relicts, thanks to this all prolific war, who have become so by French and Spanish cannon, or French and Spanish jails. And what is worse, I have done all this, without requiring a single certificate of marriage, or a single character of honesty, so that it may have gone forth amongst as errant jades as any in Plymouth. (II, 287)

It is not that Foston is unaware of his duty to succour only the ‘deserving poor’; throughout the novel we see that great care is taken to ensure that charity is directed towards the individual needs of worthy recipients. It is rather that his definition of ‘deserving’ is more generous than that of society at large, particularly when confronting the plight of women and children made destitute by war.

*Mount Henneth*’s engagement with economic rather than civic humanist discourse is reflected in the naval actions in the novel, which feature the commercial enterprise of the privateer rather than the patriotic endeavours of the Royal Navy (although wartime prize money was a powerful incentive to naval officers too, as Jane Austen’s letters and novels remind us). Wartime privateering was a highly profitable trade and one estimate for 1779 suggests that there were 120 privateers operating out of Liverpool alone, with nearly nine thousand crew, all eager to make money

from their encounters with the enemy.<sup>5</sup> For the sailors in *Mount Henneth*, the war is an economic opportunity rather than an occasion for patriotic endeavour. When Captain Suthall's seizure of Camitha Melton and her companion interferes with the lucrative task of attacking enemy shipping, his crew are incensed that 'kidnapping them there jades, had kept them three weeks out of the Bay of Biscay, and spoiled their luck' (II, 162).

Privateers are not the only entrepreneurs in the novel who flourish in wartime and profit from its uncertainties. Whilst merchants and landowners, on whose activities the prosperity and stability of the nation depends, are injured by the conflict, unscrupulous speculators exploit the war for private gain, taking advantage of the financial opportunities offered by volatile markets:

The angry bulls go bellowing up and down, damning the ministry, because the times are lowring like themselves. Martinico taken, or Count d'Estaing, with his ships and men, conveniently deposited at the bottom of the sea, might enable these gentlemen to sell to advantage the stock they have contracted to buy. Now these are honest fellows, and heartily wish success to the arms of their country.

Not so the bears. These ... are under the disagreeable necessity of first buying what they have engaged to sell.

The loss of Jamaica, or the defeat of Sir Henry Clinton, or any event which would give a temporary tumble to the stocks, would be propitious to these worthy gentlemen. (I, 72)

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<sup>5</sup> Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 624.



This ironic account of dealings on the newly constituted Stock Exchange reveals a distrust of financial speculation that Bage shares with writers of the civic humanist tradition, since the patriotism of the bulls and the defeatism of the bears are both dictated by economic self-interests that are only tangentially linked to the interests of the state.<sup>6</sup>

As Gary Kelly observes, Bage pursues his objectives ‘not in a straight line, but by parallels and digressions’.<sup>7</sup> His circuitous narratives and multiple plots are all designed to lend weight to the proposition that the American War made little sense, economically or politically. Those commentators who claimed that the purpose of the war was to protect Britain’s right to tax colonial imports are reminded that the cost of the conflict was infinitely greater than the revenue it sought to secure. Those who contended that the aim of the conflict was to enforce the constitutional authority of the mother country over her colonies are robustly informed that the military response had merely lent substance to colonial claims of imperial oppression. These arguments are wittily rehearsed in John Cheslyn’s account of the dispute, which is cast in the form of a fictional dialogue between imperial Carthage and her colonial territories in the Hesperides. The Carthaginians maintain that colonies should be regulated for the benefit of the parent state, whilst the inhabitants of the Hesperides insist that they are entitled to the same political freedoms that the citizens of

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<sup>6</sup> The first purpose-built Stock Exchange in Sweeting’s Alley had opened in 1773.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 63.

Carthage ‘so justly boast of as their greatest safeguard’ (I, 61). When Carthage insists on her sovereign right to levy colonial taxation, the Hesperides argue that they must be allowed to tax themselves, ‘as the people of your good country are accustomed to do’ (I, 60). As the dispute escalates, the tone of the Carthaginians becomes more peremptory and the response of the Hesperides more intransigent. The dialogue grows increasingly acrimonious until Carthage takes refusal as a test of authority, changes requests into demands, and resorts to military action to ensure obedience:

C[arthage]. Implicit compliance, unconditional submission, and your money, are the things we want, and will have.

H[esperides]. Win them, and wear them.

So Carthage sent out fleets and armies, and spent as much of her own money in five years, as she had expected to get of her colonies in one hundred. (I, 62)

Similar views had been widely expounded by members of the parliamentary opposition who advocated conciliation rather than conflict, and the *Monthly Review* singled out this dialogue as a specimen of Bage’s ‘sprightly manner of reasoning on a subject which graver politicians have not discussed with more solid argument, in long orations in the House, or in laboured productions from the press’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Monthly Review*, 66, p.130.

### *The Soldier's Story*

Cheslyn's view of the conflict as an ill-conceived and badly managed imperialist adventure is reinforced in an interpolated narrative that recounts the experiences of John Morgan, a common soldier who has recently returned from the war. Bage's ironic use of the stock character of the wounded veteran underlines the differences between his satirical representation of the war and the emotional account presented by Pratt, who casts the figure in a conventionally heroic and sentimental mould. In *The Pupil of Pleasure* and *Emma Corbett*, soldiers pursue military glory with a 'martial veneration, which rises to everything but idolatry', and imbue the British cause with their own ideals of patriotic heroism.<sup>9</sup> John Morgan, on the other hand, is a distinctly unheroic figure, and his narrative is notably lacking in the patriotic rhetoric and lofty sentiments with which Pratt's military veterans embellish their accounts. Moreover, his story is a salutary reminder that, for many of the combatants, military service was involuntary, a consequence of lottery, compulsion, or economic necessity, rather than civic virtue. In its condemnation of rapacity and injustice, Morgan's narrative has elements in common with the story of 'old Edwards' in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), but Morgan's cynical irony is in sharp contrast to Edwards's naïve and unashamed sentimentality.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pratt, *The Pupil of Pleasure*, II, 62.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; repr. 2001), pp. 63-76.

Morgan first comes to the attention of the Fostons and their friends when they are returning from a visit to Caradoc Hall and stop to dine at an inn where the magistrates are in session. Morgan is brought before the court because he has been found stealing turnips in a farmer's field. Returning penniless from America, where he has lost an arm and a leg in the war, he is trying to make his way back to his home parish in order to claim relief. When asked to relate his story, Morgan explains that he began life as a labourer's son in a Welsh village but left home at the age of eleven in order to avoid starvation, and eventually settled in Staffordshire. As a young man he fell foul of the parish officers, and was repeatedly selected to serve in the local militia. Suspecting that the militia ballot had been rigged, he decided to enlist as a regular and was sent to serve in the American colonies. His recruitment owes everything to the laws of economics and nothing to the ideology of patriotism. On arrival in America, Morgan discovered that peacetime soldiering compared favourably to the hardships of life as a labourer in rural Britain. He was stationed in Boston, where he found life very pleasant, 'a great deal of victuals being to be got for a little labour' (II, 90). Unfortunately, however, the 'grumblings that arose about tea and taxation' eventually brought his pleasant life of 'peace and pudding' to an abrupt end (II, 90-1). With a degree of nonchalance that ironically sidesteps the brutal physicality of the conflict, Morgan rehearses the names of all the battles in which he fought. They include Bunker Hill, where he was

wounded, Long Island, White Plains, and Trenton, where he was wounded again and taken prisoner. His subsequent exchange, instead of being a cause for celebration, merely allowed him to be despatched to Quebec as a member of Burgoyne's ill-fated Canadian expedition.

Morgan's short but vivid account of his military adventures briefly brings the American War to centre stage. The events of Burgoyne's 1777 Canadian campaign had been so widely rehearsed in letters, dispatches, newspaper articles and military memoirs that Bage could take his readers' knowledge of the salient points for granted.<sup>11</sup> The hardships endured by members of the expedition as they attempted to force a passage through inhospitable terrain, without adequate equipment or supplies, are described with powerful, though economical, irony and the atrocities committed by Burgoyne's Indian troops are sketched in with a similar brisk detachment:

As soon as I was exchanged I was ordered for Quebec, and found myself one of that distinguished band who were destined to explore their way, like crocodiles, by land and water, through two or three hundred leagues of barren land ... We were attended by whole nations of copper-coloured gentry, who made most delightful bonfires all along the road. It was an unfortunate day indeed, which did not furnish them with a house to burn, and a family to cut up. (II, 91-2)

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<sup>11</sup> Amongst the most widely circulated accounts were those published in the *Annual Register*. See also, Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition; Remarks on General Burgoyne's State of the Expedition; A Brief Examination of the Plan and Conduct of the Northern Expedition in America in 1777* (London: T. Hookham, 1779); *The Detail and Conduct of the American War, under Generals Gage, Howe, Burgoyne and Vice Admiral Lord Howe* (London: Richardson and Urquhart, 1780).

The controversy surrounding Burgoyne's Indian alliances will be explored more fully in Chapter Six. At present, it is sufficient to note the difference between Bage's sharply astringent humour and the strident rhetoric with which the British employment of Indian warriors is more usually deplored. Without political posturing or moral didacticism, in two brief but brilliant sentences, Morgan succinctly expresses the distaste felt by the majority of Britons for the customs and conduct of their Native American allies.

After being wounded in a skirmish and nearly scalped by an over-eager Indian boy, Morgan is eventually helped back to camp, where the surgeon amputates his arm. He laconically observes that the amputation 'was the most lively sensation [he] had ever experienced, but then it was glorious, and soldiers should be content' (II, 92-3). The ironic force invested in the word 'glorious' exposes the gap between the brutality of the soldier's experience of war and the heroic rhetoric with which it is conventionally invested. Not only does Morgan's succinct irony subvert sentimental and civic humanist ideals of heroic patriotism, but the expectation that a soldier should remain *content*, even in the face of mutilation and death, is a covert reminder of the disciplinary purpose of those ideological constructions.

Morgan's repatriation is delayed when his ship is attacked by an American cruiser and he once again becomes a prisoner of war. After his release he obtains employment as an overseer on a tobacco plantation, only to be discharged because he is too weak to whip the slaves properly, but

whether his weakness is a result of physical debility or moral repugnance is not made clear. After a number of further adventures Morgan finally returns to England, where he learns that his work on the plantation disqualifies him from receiving a military pension. He is thus rendered completely destitute and the only course left open to him is to return to his home parish to claim relief, thereby completing the circular trajectory of his life from starvation to destitution. A pert response to one of the magistrates seems likely to earn him a whipping, the sole reward for his patriotic endeavours:

I have been nine years serving my country in America; I lost my arm there, and my leg in a battle at sea. I am returning home to my parish without a penny in my purse, have had the misfortune to feel the keen pangs of hunger, and am going to be whipt for eating turnips.

I would help being angry if I could; but I own it makes me mad when I think of having been in fifteen engagements, shot through and through, and came home poor and penniless, to be whipt for eating turnips. (II, 85)

He is rescued from this fate through the intervention of Mr Foston, who offers him ‘a comfortable settlement, for life, in Henneth Castle, the chosen abode of love, friendship, and benevolence’ (II, 96). However, the reader is left with an uncomfortable awareness of the very different fate that would have awaited the veteran soldier had it not been for his chance encounter with Foston and his friends.

### *The American Perspective*

Bage's account of the war is amplified and enriched by the introduction of two American characters. Mr Melton is an active supporter of the American cause who decides to move to France with his daughter following the death of his wife and sons. As their ship approaches the French coast it is attacked and boarded by Captain Suthall, a villainous and unscrupulous British privateer. When the American ship appears to be sinking Suthall seizes Camitha and carries her back to his own vessel, leaving Mr Melton and the American crew to drown. It later transpires that the call to abandon ship was a ruse devised by the American captain to save his vessel from Suthall's clutches, but many weeks elapse before it becomes known that Mr Melton is still alive. After being held for some time at Suthall's home in Deptford, Camitha is confined in a London brothel, where Suthall attempts to rape her and the brothel-keeper offers her for sale amongst the clientele. Camitha's spirited resistance is explicitly associated with her nationality, and Bage describes how she indignantly refuted Suthall's claims of ownership and 'asserted her claim to independency and freedom, (for she is an American) with great spirit and force of language' (I, 75). Her outspoken audacity mirrors the defiant stance of her fellow countrymen, and the captain's repeated attempts to assert a spurious authority over her merely strengthen her resolve. In her own account of the attempted rape she reports that:



The man was drunk, and talked with such vehemence, about my being his property, and selling me for a slave to the plantations, that though I gave myself over for lost, his foolish rhodomontades raised a salutary anger.

I told him, I acknowledged neither his power, nor his right. (I, 135-6)

Although her means of self-defence are limited, Camitha, like her rebellious compatriots, makes the most effective use of available weapons, attacking her assailant with a pair of scissors that she has concealed in her pocket.

Camitha is eventually rescued from captivity by Henry Cheslyn, who escorts her to Henneth Castle. In her attachment to liberty and her determination to resist unlawful authority, Camitha is clearly representative of her nation. Nevertheless, Flynn's reading of the novel as 'a contest between America, as represented by the virtuous, but helpless woman, and a commercial England, which sees everything and everyone as a commodity, and the rightful property of the nation' is surely an oversimplification.<sup>12</sup> As I have already noted, *Mount Henneth* presents a largely favourable picture of commercial England. That entrepreneurial activity can be motivated by greed and acquisitiveness is not in dispute, and the novel features several examples of those who ignore the laws of humanity in their search for profit, Captain Suthall and the brothel-keeper amongst them. But the true spirit of commerce is embodied in the character of Foston and lies at the heart of his utopian settlement, where he proposes that:

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<sup>12</sup> Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, p. 18.

Every man amongst us, should be a man of business, of science, and of pleasure.

We must have manufactures, that other folks may be as happy as ourselves ... we must have commerce, or the manufactures will be useless. (II, 304)

His suggestion wins unanimous consent and the new community make plans to manufacture linen and glass, fell timber, build ships, and resume trading with America as soon as the embargo on transatlantic commerce is lifted. Flynn's analysis confuses the aggressive resolve of the British government to maintain their hold over the colonies, which the novel clearly opposes, with the enterprise, energy and benevolence of the commercial nation, which it unambiguously supports. It also ignores Mr Melton's role in the novel.

Camitha is not the only American in *Mount Henneth*, and her father's story is as important in representing the spirit of the new republic as her own. After Suthall's capture of his daughter, Melton spends several months in England trying to obtain news of her. His relief on learning that she is safe at Henneth Castle is dispelled when Suthall reclaims his prize by kidnapping Camitha and her companion, Mrs Tyrell, from a nearby beach. This apparently implausible occurrence is based on the real-life exploits of the American privateer, John Paul Jones, who had mounted a similar daring

raid on St Mary's Isle in 1778 in an attempt to capture the Earl of Selkirk.<sup>13</sup> Like many other incidents in the novel, the episode serves as a reminder that the novel's original readers did not experience the war as a distant transatlantic event, but as a circumstance that impinged on their daily lives in all kinds of ways.

Before embarking on his abduction of Camitha, Suthall informs the authorities about her father, who has been living quietly in London under an assumed name. Melton is immediately arrested on suspicion of being an American spy and his imprisonment, together with the efforts made by Foston and John Cheslyn to secure his release, is the occasion for further reflections on the war as a sign of the decay of civic virtue in Britain. Cheslyn recounts how he and Foston have spent their time:

Putting lord A and lord B in mind of their infinite wisdom and goodness; and bedaubing clerks in office. Endeavouring to persuade folks in power, that to dismiss Mr Melton without condition, is wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best; whilst their heads run *per contra*, on renunciations of rebellion, oaths of allegiance, and a farrago of political nonsense. (II, 117)

Melton regards the British demands as despotic and argues that compliance would be 'a desertion of principle; it is baseness; it is slavery' (II, 120). The resulting deadlock is a replication in miniature of the intransigent attitudes that led to war. In the novel, fortunately, common sense prevails and Melton

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<sup>13</sup> Jones's exploit is also the basis for an episode in Charlotte Smith's novel, *The Young Philosopher*. See p. 336,

is released and allowed to remain in England on the understanding that he will not engage in any disloyal activity. However, he does not hide his sceptical view of Britain's future prospects from his friends:

Your country, says he, is ruined. To say nothing of the war, or suppose it successful, you are verging to destruction by the silent operation of finance. Your public virtue is gone, or resident only in an inconsiderable part of the middle ranks; the head and tail of the fish — stink horribly. (II, 120)

Melton's attachment to liberty is an inheritance from his father, who is represented as having been responsible for convincing his fellow Bostonians to abandon their belief in witchcraft. This feat is accomplished through the workings of the jury system and the operation of a free press, which allow reason to prevail against the forces of fear and superstition. The story is not meant to be taken literally, but to offer a defence of the bulwarks of liberty that the British government had sought to curtail in America.

By the time that *Mount Henneth* was published the military outlook in America was bleak, and the accounts of the war that are scattered throughout the novel can be seen as a way of acknowledging errors and coming to terms with defeat. A Hessian officer who is befriended by Foston wryly assures him that a British victory will only be possible if the Americans can be made to 'cut their own throats' (II, 295). If the novel was published early in 1782, as H. R. Steeves and Michael Moran have argued, it appeared precisely at the moment when public support for the war was at

its lowest ebb.<sup>14</sup> When the news of Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown reached England in November 1781, it prompted renewed attacks on the government's conduct of the war. On 22 February 1782, General Conway's motion that the American War be abandoned was defeated in the House of Commons by a single vote; five days later the motion was carried by a majority of nineteen and Lord North announced his retirement from office. In its acceptance of defeat combined with utopian hopes of renewal, *Mount Henneth* anticipates the mood of dismay, resignation and relief that would dominate post-war politics in Britain until the end of the decade.

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<sup>14</sup> H. R. Steeves, 'The Date of Bage's "Mount Henneth"', *Notes and Queries*, 1965, p. 27; Michael Moran, 'More on The Date of Bage's "Mount Henneth"', *Notes and Queries*, 1978, pp. 61-2.

## Chapter 4: The Discourse of Liberty (2)

### *The Fair Syrian* (1787)

Five years after *Mount Henneth* was published, Bage revisited the events of the American War of Independence in his third novel, *The Fair Syrian*. Liberty and virtue are once again the central themes, but whereas *Mount Henneth* projects the values of a bourgeois commercial society, *The Fair Syrian* is concerned with the structure of the polity and the public responsibilities of the individual citizen. Gary Kelly has argued that it is not until the 1790s that Bage begins to make open comparisons between private and public moralities, but a close examination of his earlier novels reveals many overt parallels between the two.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of *The Fair Syrian*. For the novel does not engage with politics solely ‘at the level of familial and personal relations’, as James Watt has recently suggested; it also participates in the discourse of liberty and oppression in much more direct ways.<sup>2</sup> The most striking of these is Bage’s use of the conflict in America to initiate a comparison of political systems in Britain, France,

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> James Watt, “‘The Blessings of Freedom’: Britain, America and “the East” in the Fiction of Robert Bage’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 22 (2009), 49-69 (p.49).

America and 'the Orient' that highlights the dangers of absolute rule and arbitrary justice wherever they may be found.

The novel's two main protagonists, John Amington and the Marquis de St. Clair, meet while they are fighting on opposite sides in the American War. Their friendship flourishes despite the difference in their characters and politics, and when the war is over they return together to Amington's estate in England. On a subsequent visit to Ireland, they become involved in the affairs of Aurelia Clare and her friend, Honoria Warren. Honoria was born and brought up in the Levant but has recently been living with Aurelia's aunt, Mrs Lingard, who rescued her from slavery. As Amington and St Clair arrive in Killarney, Honoria is in prison accused of murdering her benefactress. Proclaiming her innocence, but unable to refute the evidence against her, she is widely assumed to be guilty. Partly as a result of Amington's intervention, but mostly as a demonstration of the transparency, accessibility and impartiality of British justice, the evidence against Honoria is shown to be false and she is triumphantly acquitted. By this time Amington is passionately in love with her, and in a moment of drunken euphoria he asks her to become his mistress. When he later repents and begs her to marry him, Honoria insists on a year's separation as a test of his commitment. St Clair is equally smitten with Aurelia, but knows that there is no prospect that his mother will ever agree to his marriage to an Irish girl of no consequence. The second volume describes his efforts to escape the

marriage his mother has arranged for him and gives a retrospective history of the Warren family's sufferings under Ottoman oppression, until the denouement sees the lovers safely married and their friends united in a community of goodwill.

The structure of *The Fair Syrian* differs significantly from that of *Mount Henneth*, although it remains epistolary in form. Where *Mount Henneth* is rich in dialogue, debate and banter, allowing few assertions or opinions to pass unchallenged, *The Fair Syrian* begins by presenting St Claur's and Amington's unmediated accounts of their experiences in America. Bage's representation of the war remains largely satirical, a comic inversion of chivalric ideals of martial heroism and patriotic endeavour. Amington becomes a volunteer in a flush of patriotic enthusiasm, but quickly discovers the war to be ignoble and unjust. St Claur's career as a soldier is ignominiously brief, and after several ridiculous encounters his military exploits come to an abrupt end when he is wounded in a skirmish and taken prisoner by Amington. His account of these events mixes Gallic bravado and self-deprecating humour with an undertone of real sensibility, which simultaneously mocks his own inexperience and highlights the haphazard nature of warfare and the sudden reversals of fortune that mark its progress.

As the novel progresses, and the casual ties of acquaintance ripen into a web of affective relationships, the letters become more dialogic in



nature and new correspondents are drawn into the conversational circle. Amington and St Claur remain the most prolific writers but the voices of Aurelia and Honoria, and of Lord and Lady Bembridge (Amington's sister and brother-in-law), compete for the reader's attention. The novel's wide geographic range allows different forms of social and political organization to be explored and compared through narrative, character and dialogue, although the resulting analysis is more remarkable for the author's lively and good-humoured wit than for the depth or novelty of his observations. However, whilst Bage's cultural comparisons are largely based on common national stereotypes, his pleasantly ironic humour, and the freshness and informality of his writing style, promote an alert and responsive attitude in the reader that encourages informed and critical engagement with the text. Contemporary reviewers complimented him on offering something at once more engaging and more substantial than the average novel or romance, detecting in his style and subject matter 'the honourable and amiable character of a philosopher, and friend of man'.<sup>3</sup>

The novel's representation of the war functions on several different levels. In terms of the plot, it brings Amington and St Claur together and cements their friendship. On the macro-political level, their contrasting experience initiates the comparison of competing forms of social and political organization which is the central purpose of the novel. Whilst the

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<sup>3</sup> *Monthly Review*, 76 (1787), 325-9 (p. 326)

plot is both ‘rambling’ and ‘improbable’, as H. R. Steeves recognized, it also has the thematic unity that Gary Kelly describes, which consists of ‘gathering events and characters and conversations around certain ideas’.<sup>4</sup> Apparently disparate accounts of French absolutism, British constitutionalism, ‘Oriental’ despotism and American liberty combine to frame a critique of British politics that simultaneously recognizes the underlying strengths of the constitution and warns that its balance has been dangerously disturbed.

### *French Absolutism*

*The Fair Syrian* opens with St Clair’s irreverent account of the quarrel with his formidably autocratic mother that launches his military career. Although this early introduction to absolutism is rendered largely in terms of the relationship between mother and son, the power struggle between them is conveyed in a political language that identifies the Marquise with the values of the *ancien régime* and imbues her private actions with public significance. Her confrontation with St Clair thus becomes the first strand in the complex network of political comparisons that is woven into the novel. For St Clair, it soon transpires, is no willing military volunteer. His

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<sup>4</sup> H. R. Steeves, *Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 277; Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 27.

mother has ordered him to join Rochambeau's army in America in order to terminate his liaison with an opera dancer, vowing to imprison him by means of a *lettre de cachet* if he refused to obey her commands. Her threat typifies the despotic practices of the *ancien régime* and establishes an immediate parallel between her domestic tyranny and the absolutism of the French state. At the same time, Bage warns his readers that political autocracy is not confined to France. The Marquise's despotic rule is characteristic of all authoritarian regimes, and even held sway in Britain in the not too distant past, as St Clair reminds Amington:

Oh that my mother were Queen of England in her own right; what pretty rixations there would be betwixt her and your lower house, about prerogative. Unlike your Charles the First, she would die a martyr without yielding an inch.<sup>5</sup>

St Clair's whimsical visualization of a renewed conflict between the British people (in the form of the House of Commons) and their monarch (in the person of his mother) is a reminder that absolute rule remains a prospect to be feared and guarded against, even in Georgian Britain.

Torn by conflicting feelings of duty and resentment, St Clair describes his quarrel with the Marquise in the language used by the American colonists to justify their political rebellion:

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian*, 2 vols (London: J. Walter and J. Bew; Shrewsbury: P. Sandford, 1787; repr. New York: Garland, 1979), I, 324. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

Unconditional submission was her doctrine; I took a distaste for it in America, and ever since have sighed for unequivocal reciprocity; so that my egregious failings, my rebellious principles, my scanty pittance of filial piety were picked up in the thirteen provinces, and amongst you licentious Americo-Angles of the old world. (II, 315-6)

His obstinate resistance to her despotic demands is political in origin, inspired by his experiences in America and his subsequent association with Englishmen such as Amington, who value liberty. The elision of public and private rhetoric emphasizes the Marquise's role as a symbol of political autocracy, who boasts of her ability to act '*en Prince*', rather than as a mother (II, 142). In sending her son to fight in America for private rather than public reasons, the Marquise mirrors the opportunism of the French state, whose support for the Americans was dictated by self-interest rather than principle.

Despite his sojourn in America, St Clair's aspirations remain those of a reformer rather than a revolutionary. When his mother tries to steer him towards a career in the church or the army and offers to secure his speedy advance to the rank of bishop or colonel, he has an alternative suggestion to offer:

The English, Madam, have a character they value above all others ... it is an independant [sic] country gentleman, not addicted to mischief — a thing much wanted in France...

I would get me a pretty little wife, and we would make pretty little children, and love them, and one another. And I would make two

blades of corn and of grass grow, where only one grew before, which the English philosophers say is quite as useful an employment as murdering mankind. (I, 337)

Suspecting that this Swiftian plan is designed to facilitate her son's marriage to Aurelia, the Marquise rejects the proposal out of hand unless he agrees to marry a wife of her choosing. St Claur resists the Marquise's attempts to force him to marry against his will but, with no independent income, he is unable to marry without her approval. It is only after her death that he becomes free both to marry Aurelia and to develop his estates for the benefit of his tenants.

### *British Constitutionalism*

Peter Faulkner argues that the heroes and heroines of *The Fair Syrian* 'are not typical of their countries', but St Claur and Amington exhibit many of the attributes conventionally thought to distinguish the French and English national character.<sup>6</sup> Where St Claur is vivacious, emotional and impetuous, Amington is quiet, rational and self-controlled. He belongs to the class traditionally considered the bulwark of the British constitution, because their ownership of land was thought to give them a 'permanent stake in the

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<sup>6</sup> Faulkner, *Robert Bage*, p. 85.

stability of the nation'.<sup>7</sup> However, although Amington is qualified to act as a legislator by birth, character and education, his father has brought him up to occupy a private, rather than a public station in life:

Amongst the crouds, hourly rushing in to serve the state, my son cannot be missed; but he may give, in private life, an example, a much wanted example, of temperance in pleasures; of kindness to afflicted merit; of general benevolence. Let me be able to give him these habitudes, I give him happiness, I give my country its best citizen. (I, 62-3)

This retreat into private life is prompted by the corrupt state of the public sphere, which is exemplified in the novel's satirical account of the British aristocracy and their life of fashionable excess.

Many late eighteenth-century novels depict the depraved morals and trivial preoccupations of members of the upper class, but *The Fair Syrian* is unusual in focussing on the political, rather than the moral, consequences of their behaviour. Bage argues that the aristocracy have become incapable of fulfilling their constitutional role and are therefore a threat to liberty, as Amington points out when he admonishes his dissolute brother-in-law, Lord Bembridge:

You are a peer of the realm, my Lord, and should know your order was instituted for far different purposes. To stand, the grand barrier betwixt the crown and the people — to be the bulwark of the

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<sup>7</sup> John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730-1780: An Equal Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 33.

prerogatives of both — to run a race of glory — not a match at Newmarket. (I, 174)

The proper functioning of the aristocratic class is exemplified by Amington's friend, Osborne. Although Osborne prefers to live in retirement, when he succeeds to his uncle's title he accepts that he has also inherited a 'sacred duty due to the community' (II, 249). His acknowledgment that personal inclination must henceforth yield to civic obligation is the antithesis of Bembridge's heedless self-indulgence. It is also a reminder that the public virtue of the aristocracy is central to a political ideology which held that a balanced constitution depended on the wisdom of a senate as well as the voice of a popular assembly and the authority of a supreme magistrate. If these three elements were out of balance, liberty would be at risk. This is the current state of the British polity as Bage depicts it, and the coercion of the American colonies is visible evidence of that decay.

As in *Mount Henneth*, the war in America is presented as a political and military absurdity. Initially, despite his temperate disposition and rational education, Amington is dazzled by the loyalist rhetoric of the ministerial lobby and is impatient to demonstrate his virtue in the martial arena. Sir John disapproves of his son's choice but respects his right of self-determination, and gives him permission to join the army as a volunteer. Once in America, Amington soon realizes that his enthusiasm has been misplaced:

I thought myself a Patriot. I pressed forward to the service of my country. Alas! Experience, Reflection, and Observation, have taught me, I could not have served it worse. Fatal to half the world would have been the hour in which we had enslaved America. — Most fatal to ourselves. (I, 23)

Luckily, Britain's misguided attempt at coercion is counter-productive. The love of liberty that Americans have inherited from the mother country inspires their resistance and protects the British from the consequences of their own actions. Amington's relief that the war ended in failure marks the extent to which his earlier belligerent chauvinism has given way to a more mature understanding. His final position reflects the views of those who argued that the attack on colonial freedom which they detected in a wide range of imperial policies – the acquisition of Quebec and the instruments adopted for its administration, the coercive measures imposed on the American colonies since the end of the Seven Years War, the increasing corruption signalled by unbridled territorial expansion in India – was evidence of a slide towards despotism and a prelude to the destruction of liberty at home.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Richard Price's letter to Charles Chauncy dated 25 February 1775, in *The Correspondence of Richard Price*, ed. by W. Bernard Peach and D. O. Thomas, 3 vols (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983-94), I, 188-91.



### *'Oriental' Despotism*

The Syrian adventures of Honoria Warren and her father focus on the oppression of the individual in the Ottoman Empire, widely regarded in late eighteenth-century Britain as a society that carried despotic government to extremes.<sup>9</sup> Watt's assertion that Bage's engagement with 'the despotic character of the East' is elaborated primarily through his account of the condition of Eastern women is a considerable oversimplification.<sup>10</sup>

Although the sexual slavery of the harems to which Honoria is consigned is certainly one sign of the 'Oriental' despotism that Bage invokes, it is not the most significant aspect. Far more important in Bage's eyes, because it is a cause rather than a consequence of tyranny, is the absence of an open and accessible system of justice. When Mr Warren incurs the enmity of Saif Ebn Abu by refusing to finance his dissolute lifestyle or to sanction his marriage to Honoria, he is summarily arrested and imprisoned. Honoria is told that he has died under torture and that his possessions have been confiscated, and she is given to Saif as a slave. Both Honoria and her father are innocent of any error beyond finding themselves in a society where it is impossible for any individual 'to resist extream malignity, supported by power' (II, 49).

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<sup>9</sup> The changing trajectory of British attitudes to the Ottoman Empire and Islamic culture is outlined by Linda Colley in *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), pp. 23-134.

<sup>10</sup> Watt, "'The Blessings of Freedom'", p. 56.

Some years later St Claur discovers Mr Warren languishing in the Seven Towers, Constantinople's equivalent of the Bastille, and Warren describes how the subjects of a despotic regime have no recourse to justice:

Five years, I have been a prisoner. Tyranny has reduced me from affluence to beggary. Though innocent, I have been treated as a criminal. Such is the despotic nature of the government by which I have been struck, I have no hopes of being free. My trial I have solicited in vain. In vain I must solicit it. They cannot prove me guilty, and dare not find me innocent. (II, 299-300)

Without a trial, he has no opportunity to prove his innocence, and the full significance of his daughter's ordeal in Ireland now becomes apparent. Like her father, Honoria is the victim of a false accusation, but the common law writ of Habeas Corpus and the right to trial enshrined in Magna Carta guarantee that her case will come to court and that the evidence against her will be subjected to public scrutiny. English common law, under which British subjects were 'liable to no Punishment, no Confinement, no Loss, but what those Laws subject us to', had long been recognized as the corner stone of British liberty, and so it proves in Honoria's case.<sup>11</sup> Although the evidence appears to point to her guilt, after all the witnesses have spoken the judge invites Honoria to speak in her own defence, noting that her story will not be evidence, 'but it may be truth; and truth has sometimes a power to force itself upon the understanding, against the opposition of prejudice itself' (I, 118). Honoria's oriental upbringing makes her sceptical that truth

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Fielding, *A Charge Delivered to the Grand Jury* (London: A Millar, 1749), p. 39.

alone can convince the court, but she nevertheless gives a brief account of the ‘violent stroke of despotism’ that condemned her to the life of slavery from which Mrs Lingard had rescued her, and of her subsequent life with her benefactress (I, 119). After hearing her story one of the lawyers present in the court rises ‘to defend innocence so manifest, and so oppressed’, and by cross-examining the witnesses is able to show that one of Mrs Lingard’s servants was guilty of the crime (I, 124). Honoria’s acquittal is carefully staged to show the legal system fulfilling its central purpose, ‘which is to discover truth, and succour innocence’ (I, 130).

Mr Warren’s release from the Seven Towers, in contrast, is achieved by the more oblique methods necessary in despotic societies. St Claur enlists the help of the British Ambassador in Constantinople, who currently has considerable influence with a Turkish Court that is anxious for British assistance in its quarrel with Catherine the Great of Russia, ‘the greatest bully in petticoats, amongst the princes of the earth’ (II, 307). The French Ambassador also lends his support, and the two diplomats try to convince the Grand Vizier that ‘justice, humanity and compassion’ demand that Warren be freed (II, 332). It is, however, the prospect of taking possession of Warren’s confiscated wealth that finally persuades the Sultan to return a small part of Warren’s property and order his release. Public justice and restitution are unobtainable. Indeed, it is not until the British Ambassador learns of Warren’s situation and demands his liberty ‘as a British subject’

that Turkish officials first learn of the prisoner's existence. Had this not occurred, they agree that 'in all probability he would have died in the Seven Towers unnoticed and unknown' (II, 318)

### *American Liberty*

At the outset of the novel a brief, but witty, analysis of American society highlights the differences between the old world and the new, seeking to identify the cultural and political practices appropriate to the good society. *The Fair Syrian* proposes that civic virtue, which the novel shows to be non-existent in Asia and in dangerous decline in Europe, is flourishing anew in America. Free from the malign influences of established religion and hereditary nobility, the Americans are shown to be engaged in constructing a civil society in which liberal ideals are truly valued.

After St Clair has recovered from his wound, he spends some time travelling through New England and Pennsylvania, engaging in encounters that dramatize the differences between old and new world constructions of liberty and virtue. After visiting the 'saints of Boston', whose Puritan religion, revolutionary politics and sexual restraint he finds equally uncongenial, he travels to Philadelphia, where he makes several agreeable acquaintances. On a visit to the country his political and religious beliefs are

challenged by an outspoken Quaker farmer who argues that, since liberty is the product of reason and nature, it will always be most at home in simple surroundings. It therefore flourishes in America, where civic life is free from the corrupting influence of executive patronage and private life is uncontaminated by aristocratic habits of gallantry and libertinism.

The Quaker makes much of the paradox whereby the absolutist French and Spanish monarchies are supporting the American struggle for independence, whilst the supposedly constitutional British monarch is acting to deprive his transatlantic subjects of their cherished freedoms:

Thou knowest the Americans are struggling for liberty. Thy King, and the King of Spain, who dote upon it so, that they keep it all to themselves, and tell their people it is not for common wear, help us forward in the obtaining it with all their might; and the King of England, who lives but to extend and secure this blessing to all his subjects, is labouring as lustily to deprive us of it. (I, 34)

In the discussion that follows, the relative merits of French absolutism, British parliamentary monarchy and American republicanism are compared and contrasted. St Clair offers the standard defence of absolutism – that strong government is good government – whilst the Quaker insists that no kingdom can claim to be well governed when so many of its subjects live in such abject poverty as do the peasants in France. He compares their economic, social and political subjugation with the freedom enjoyed by the same rank in America, where ‘every man feels himself a MAN; claims his

share of the common bounties of nature; and above all, of Liberty' (I, 36). None of these arguments are new. On the contrary, they draw heavily on widely accepted and easily recognizable national stereotypes. However, they are presented in a humorous, informal and lively manner that is both original and refreshing.

When St Claur visits the drawing rooms of Philadelphia, he is astonished to discover that, in America, political liberty and sexual harmony go hand in hand. Freed from the constraints of gallantry and folly that rule in European society, American men marry for love and 'are fonder of their own wives, than of the wives of their neighbours' (I, 43). Conceding that the French are more inclined to understand liberty in terms of sexual licence than political freedom, and affecting to believe this is the sign of a superior civilization, St Claur feels called upon to challenge such barbarous practices. He presses his amorous attentions on the wife of a General, makes love to her 'sentimentally, according to the rules established at Paris', reads all her denials as an encouragement to persist and is amazed when she slaps his face and refuses to appear in public again until he has left the city (I, 43). Secretly ashamed of his conduct, St Claur nevertheless advises his friend, St Flos, to join with him in rejoicing that they both belong to a nation in which, 'though we have not the love of liberty these ultra-Atlantics boast, we have the liberty of love, which to a Frenchman is all the liberty worth a *Louis d'or*' (I, 45). His aphorism is witty and ironic, emblematic of an old world

culture that is polite, sophisticated, morally corrupt and politically effete. Its underlying message is that in *ancien régime* France, and to a lesser but still significant extent in Hanoverian England, liberty has lost its ethical and political significance. Lacking any moral component, it has been reconstructed as the freedom to pursue private passions and interests, a matter of manners and money rather than morals. In America, however, ‘love of liberty’ continues to signify a desire for the common good, and thus remains the essence of public virtue. Mediated through the experience of a fashionable young French aristocrat, the culture of the emergent republic appears both enviably virtuous and impossibly simple. St Clair’s adventures are the private manifestation of a political divide, and symptomatic of the uneasy alliance between France and America.

### *Liberty at Large*

The position of Britain, constitutionally poised midway between French absolutism and American republicanism remains somewhat ambivalent. Although *The Fair Syrian* recognizes the underlying virtues of the British constitution, particularly the protection it offers through a judicial system that is theoretically open and accessible to all, it also implies that public life has become so corrupt that civic virtue now flourishes largely in private.

The degenerate state of the aristocracy and the increasing rate of imperial expansion contribute to this decay. Bage is consistently uneasy about British imperial policy, both in America and in India, troubled by the inconsistency of a political ethic that purports to oppose absolutism at home but tyrannizes over alien peoples in distant lands. As one French commentator observes to Amington:

Yes, you are a free nation, and hate despotism most vigorously, when yourselves are not the despots. The East groans under you still; so would the West have done, but that it chose rather to fight than groan. I hope I shall have the honour one day of assisting to take this East from you; then I expect you will become a civil inoffensive people; you will go about your business a little less turbulently, and without putting on the airs of a bully upon all occasions. (II, 255-6)

The Warrens' experiences of imperial rule in Turkey are a reminder of the inexorable tendency of empires to extinguish civic virtue and undermine the freedoms of the individual.

Although *The Fair Syrian* is deeply engaged with the idea of public virtue, the novel is pessimistic about the possibility of its restoration, identifying modern manners and politics as inimical to such lofty ideals. The only effective way of contributing to the common good appears to be through the private virtues of the country landowner. This is by no means a new solution; Swift's King of Brobdingnag had also proposed that 'whoever could make two Ears of Corn, or two Blades of Grass to grow upon a Spot of Ground where only one grew before; would deserve better of Mankind,



and do more essential Service to his Country, than the whole Race of Politicians put together'.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the novel, after the expected marriages have taken place, St Claur announces his intention of embracing the same philosophy:

I have ten thousand acres of land to clear and drain. I have also three hundred *paysans* and as many *paysannes* who live in cabins, and wear wooden shoes ... Politicians may say what they will, but a constitution of government that gave this three quarters of mankind a few of the comforts of life, would be a good constitution. (II, 367-8)

In ten years time he hopes to see his peasants 'as plump, and almost as saucy as the English peasants, who are as much of the latter as can be desired' (II, 368). In the meantime he and his like-minded friends propose to spend much of their time together, alternating between France and England on an annual basis. Revolution apart, both *The Fair Syrian* and *Mount Henneth* fall back on the idea of a retired community of congenial like-minded friends as the only liberal way of life available in a corrupt polity.

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. by Paul Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; repr. 1998), pp. 124-5.

## Chapter 5: The Loyalist Perspective

### *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee (1787)*

*The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob* is unique amongst the works in this study in purporting to be written from the perspective of an American Loyalist. In a short single volume the author presents the robustly irreverent reminiscences of a Massachusetts farm boy whose comic account of his involvement in the war provides a satirical gloss on more grandiose histories of the conflict. Jonathan's resonance in post-war Britain is inseparable from his Loyalist persona, and his boastful reminiscences reflect the cynical view of American Loyalists held by many metropolitan observers. Yet his ostensibly naïve and palpably fictitious account offers a critique of the war that highlights the inexhaustible folly of the human race in general, and the greed, incompetence and cowardice of those engaged in the recent conflict in particular, more effectively than many more serious memoirs.

*Jonathan Corncob* was published anonymously in London towards the end of 1787 and the author remains unidentified. R. W. G. Vail and Noel Perrin speculate that he may have been an Englishman with naval

connections, citing his knowledge of naval practice and occasional use of peculiarly English lexis in support of their hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> However, the writer's familiarity with the colonial identity that he proclaims is equally striking, and the confidence with which he draws on real, but relatively uncommon settings – Hancock's wharf and the prison ship *Kingston* in Boston, Hull's tavern in New York – suggests personal experience of the places and people that he describes.<sup>2</sup> There is also some evidence within the text of anxieties that can be linked to the tense political situation in Massachusetts immediately prior to the work's publication in 1787. The narrative displays a more detailed knowledge of, and a closer interest in American affairs than was customary for a British commentator and it is not impossible that it was the work of an exiled loyalist or a returning officer.

The novel is so unusual in purporting to relate the adventures of an American Loyalist that it seems likely that many eighteenth-century readers would have taken its colonial origins for granted. The commentator in the *Monthly Review* was certainly convinced of the author's American identity, criticizing the disloyalty of his 'burlesque representations of the manners of his country-folk' and suggesting that they represented the attempt of a 'suffering *Loyalist*' to flatter a post-war British readership who might find

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<sup>1</sup> R. W. G. Vail, 'Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee (1787), A Commentary', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 50 (1956), 101-14 (p. 106); Noel Perrin, 'Introduction' to *Adventures of Jonathan Corncob* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1776), pp. xii -xv.

<sup>2</sup> For speculation as to the possible American origins of the author, see Henri Petter, *The Early American Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), pp. 298-300.

his ridicule of ‘*the Jonathans*’ particularly acceptable.<sup>3</sup> At a time when Loyalist refugees were still arguing their case for compensation, it is not clear whether Jonathan’s candid account of his adventures is intended to subvert or strengthen their claims. What is certain is that Jonathan’s memoir expresses the chaos of displacement that defined Loyalist experience in the post-war period, and an appreciation of that context is therefore essential to our understanding of the work.

Beyond its acknowledgment of the work’s specifically Loyalist dimensions, the *Monthly Review* also recognized a literary pedigree that owes something to Sterne but rather more to Voltaire. In its use of the naive ingénue as central protagonist and in the palpable absurdity of its comic/satiric narrative, *Jonathan Corncob* is clearly indebted to *Candide*. Jonathan shares Candide’s conviction that all will turn out for the best, and his buoyant spirit and essential liveliness persist to the very end, despite the many disasters that befall him. Throughout his calamitous career, Jonathan remains briskly and resolutely unsentimental and the reader is never called on to shed a sympathetic tear. This is partly because his preposterous wartime experiences are transparently ‘the offspring ... of a fruitful invention’, and the reader is neither invited nor expected to believe otherwise.<sup>4</sup> However, it is also an effect of the detached and humorous

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<sup>3</sup> *Monthly Review*, 77 (1787), pp. 495-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Monthly Review*, p. 495.

manner in which Jonathan recounts his adventures, as the reviewer was quick to point out:

His drollery of disposition prevails, in all circumstances; he recites every calamity in such a vein of humour, and describes such comical distresses, that we feel ourselves diverted at those sufferings which, if seriously related, would have excited our commiseration; but when do we pity those who make us laugh?<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the comic distance that is engendered by Jonathan's narrative precludes sympathetic identification, the absurdity of his experiences is exceptionally effective as a satiric device. Like Smollett, the author of *Jonathan Corncob* employs a heightened sense of the ridiculous to sustain a critique that ranges from a wry acknowledgment of human sexual foibles to a savage indictment of institutionalised cruelty and injustice.

The style and subject matter suggest that *Jonathan Corncob* was intended for an audience unconstrained by refined or feminized notions of gentility and the early reviewers are uneasy about the propriety of using the novel as a vehicle for such material. The *Critical Review* was adamant that no amount of humour could excuse the 'improper language' and 'indecent descriptions' that polluted the narrative, and threatened to consign further volumes in the same vein 'to the oblivion which they will merit'.<sup>6</sup> The *Monthly Review*, in contrast, laments the improper language, scatological humour and sexual innuendo that rendered the work unsuitable for a wider

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *Critical Review*, 65 (1788), p. 150.

public, but defends the novel in terms of its appeal to an elite readership, which was defined in terms of gender, status and a taste for public conviviality:

In a word, though we cannot recommend this work to Mrs Primly's boarding school, nor to the good people at the vicarage, yet we doubt not that it will be well received, and set the table in a roar, at the *King's Head*, and the *Ben Jonson*; — and perhaps even at Slaughter's Coffee-House.<sup>7</sup>

The habitués of inns and coffee houses, especially a tavern named after a satiric dramatist (the *Ben Jonson*) or a coffee house frequented by painters and sculptors (Slaughter's), are allowed to have more robust tastes than the young, genteel and predominantly female readers generally held responsible for the rapid expansion of the market for fiction in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Although the reviewer takes an ostensibly liberal stance, he also betrays a hierarchical view of literary propriety which suggests that he regards certain types of writing as suitable only for the cultural elite.

This chapter explores *Jonathan Corncob* in terms of its self-proclaimed American Loyalist identity. It considers the ways in which the novel reflects Loyalist experience and the tensions that divided American communities during the revolution. It also reveals how the uneasy

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<sup>7</sup> *Monthly Review*, p. 496.

<sup>8</sup> J. Paul Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 9-40 (pp. 18-26).

relationship between American Loyalism and the British establishment is expressed through the work's boisterous portrayal of the hapless hero, his wartime career and his post-war existence as a displaced refugee.

### *The Loyalist Dimension*

The war has been over for four years when Jonathan decides to publish his story. He has been a refugee in England for most of the post-war period but is now living in exile in Flanders in order to avoid imprisonment for debt and cherishes the hope that an account of his wartime experiences will persuade the Loyalist Claims Commission to award him a pension.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the British establishment reflected on their response to the refugee crisis with a complacency that is vividly captured in Benjamin West's allegorical representation of the welcome extended to displaced American Loyalists. The painting, which survives only in the form of an engraving, shows Britannia casting her capacious cloak over members of the displaced colonial elite who cluster around the British crown, while a group of widows, children, black and Native Americans hover in the

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<sup>9</sup> For the workings of the Claims Commission and the plight of loyalist refugees see Joseph Galloway, *The Claim of the American Loyalists Reviewed and Maintained upon Incontrovertible Principles of Law and Justice* (London: G. & T. Wilkie, 1788); Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: The Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965); Mary Beth Norton, *The British Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England 1774-1789* (London: Constable, 1974); Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, Settlement* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994).

background.<sup>10</sup> However, the Loyalists themselves were often disillusioned by their reception. Whilst wealthy and influential refugees eventually received compensation and pensions, large numbers of small farmers, artisans and labourers were less fortunate. Lacking money or connections, they were unable to obtain redress and were often condemned to lead the kind of precarious post-war existence that Jonathan records.<sup>11</sup>

The seeds of distrust had been sown during the war. From the outset, it was apparent to all sides in the conflict that British victory in America was dependent on mobilising Loyalist support.<sup>12</sup> Assured by prominent Loyalists in exile that ‘not one fifth part of the people of America has, at any period, supported from choice the American rebellion’, the ministry expected the majority of the colonial population to rally to their cause.<sup>13</sup> When the boasted assistance failed to materialize, metropolitan Britons were ‘miserably disappointed’, and began to question the strength and sincerity of Loyalist commitment.<sup>14</sup> For their part, Loyalists in the colonies were disillusioned by the failure of successive British commanders to protect Crown supporters from persecution and reprisals, and deeply angered by the

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin West, *Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain in the Year 1783* (survives only as an engraving by H. Moses: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection). A representation of the painting forms the background to West’s 1812 portrait of John Eardley Wilmot (also in the Paul Mellon Collection at Yale).

<sup>11</sup> Keith Mason, ‘The American Loyalist Diaspora and the Reconfiguration of the British Atlantic World’, in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. by Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 239-59 (p. 252).

<sup>12</sup> Mackesy, *The War for America*, passim.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Galloway, *Considerations upon the American Enquiry* (London: J. Wilkie, 1779), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Mackesy, *The War for America*, p. 513.



terms of the Yorktown surrender, which offered no protection to the Loyalist militias who had served with Cornwallis. The treatment of Loyalist sympathisers was a major bone of contention in the peace negotiations of 1782-3, but the issue remained unresolved and Congress adamantly refused to sanction any form of amnesty or restitution of property.

As a result, the whole burden of compensation and resettlement fell on the British government, which established a Claims Commission to investigate Loyalist losses and decide on the level of recompense to be offered. Joseph Galloway, perhaps the most prominent of the Loyalists in exile, was confident that he and his fellow refugees were owed 'a debt of the highest and most inviolable nature, from which Parliament can never honourably and justly discharge itself, but by making adequate compensation'.<sup>15</sup> There was, however, a huge difference between the claimants' appraisal of their losses and the sums finally awarded, and most refugees received less than forty per cent of the amounts they initially claimed.<sup>16</sup> The Commission's scrutiny was rigorous and time-consuming, and although partial payments were made in 1785, 1786 and 1787, the process was not concluded until 1788, more than five years after the peace treaty had been signed.

Jonathan's Loyalist credentials are proclaimed in a title that draws attention to his nationality, rusticity, and displacement even before we meet

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<sup>15</sup> Galloway, *The Claim of the American Loyalists*, p. 114.

<sup>16</sup> Norton, *The British Americans*, pp. 216-7.

him. However, the fact that his narrative is ‘written by himself’ raises immediate questions of authenticity and dependability and we are not surprised when closer engagement with the text confirms that his account of the war is a highly idiosyncratic and potentially unreliable tale. In taking as its hero a roguish character of inferior rank and uncertain morals, and employing a loose episodic narrative structure that follows this protagonist as he moves from one adventure to the next, *Jonathan Corncob* follows in a long tradition of European picaresque narratives. There are, however, significant differences between Jonathan and the conventional hero of Spanish and French picaresque fiction, who is usually constructed as both victim and exploiter.<sup>17</sup> Jonathan possesses neither the intelligence nor the rapacity of the traditional *picaro* who relies on his wits for survival as he struggles to circumvent the venality and stupidity of his superiors. Nor is he, as Heilman would have us believe, a sophisticate ‘who can see through people and circumstances’, and manipulate situations to his own advantage.<sup>18</sup> As his name suggests, Jonathan is distinguished by his rustic and inexperienced naivety, and the novel’s satiric agenda is conveyed through his ingenuous account of events that he can neither influence nor control.

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Bjornsen, *The Picaresque Hero in English Fiction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); Philip Stevick, ‘Smollett’s Picaresque Games’, in *Tobias Smollett: Bicentennial Essays Presented to Lewis M. Knapp*, ed. by G. S. Rousseau and P-G. Boucé (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> Heilman, *America in English Fiction*, p. 74.

Jonathan's Loyalist identity is the subject of prolonged and humorous inspection. He and his siblings are the offspring of ignorant and superstitious Massachusetts farmers, and, as the eldest son, Jonathan is destined to manage the family store. In order to ensure that he is properly equipped for the role, he has been educated in reading, writing and arithmetic – and Latin. In his own mind, at least, he enjoys a local reputation as a prodigy of learning and takes pride in a range of fashionable accomplishments:

I excelled in walking in snow shoes, driving a sled, shooting squirrels, and bobbing for eels; but of all my amusements none had such charms for me as *bundling*.<sup>19</sup>

Jonathan's boast is satirical on a number of levels, simultaneously ridiculing colonial pretensions to metropolitan sophistication and challenging the artificial constructions that underpin metropolitan practices of social discrimination. His list of outlandish activities suggests the superficiality of the imperial understanding of colonial experience. Jonathan's enthusiasm for 'bundling', a New England custom that allowed young courting couples to spend the night in bed together but prohibited full sexual intercourse, not only exposes the rude, unpolished nature of colonial life to metropolitan

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<sup>19</sup> *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee. Written by Himself* (London: printed for the author; and sold by G. G. J. and G. Robinson, Paternoster-Row; and R. Faulder, New Bond-Street, 1787), pp. 18-19. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

scorn, but also hints at the ignorance of an imperial elite who thought that colonial life was adequately described by such practices.<sup>20</sup>

Jonathan's involvement in the American War owes more to accident than to ideology and is driven by a desire for self-preservation rather than patriotic fervour. His gloriously haphazard wartime career begins with an apparently innocent inattention to the etiquette of bundling. When his enthusiastic partner, Desire Slawbunk, is found to be pregnant, he is given the option to marry or to pay a penalty of fifty pounds. Unwilling to marry, but lacking funds to pay the fine, Jonathan decides to run away to New York, then occupied by British troops. Unfortunately he loses his way and finds himself in revolutionary Boston instead. A period of service as purser on an American privateer is succeeded by a period of imprisonment in the town jail that culminates in a daring escape. Jonathan's subsequent adventures include a job as accountant to a band of cattle raiders, a liaison with a 'modest' New York maiden from whom he contracts several types of venereal disease, an unexpected reunion with his family and with Desire, a post as purser on a frigate bound for Barbados, service on board a British warship, and a second period of imprisonment in Boston that is considerably enlivened by a final encounter with Desire. These amorous and military adventures are characterized by the collision (or collusion) of Jonathan's

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<sup>20</sup> A more detailed account of bundling can be found in Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977; repr. Penguin, 1990), pp. 384-5.

hapless naivety with the irresistible forces of religious hypocrisy, predatory female sexuality, republican zeal, West Indian plantation slavery, British military discipline and American venality. The West Indian episodes in particular, although falling outside the scope of this study, are notable for their savagely satiric deconstruction of imperial and racial identities.

Jonathan's attitude to the war is unashamedly pragmatic. Lacking any ideological commitment or patriotic fervour, he engages opportunistically on both sides of the conflict as the need arises. As portrayed in *Jonathan Corncob*, the American War is an inglorious affair, characteristically lampooned as a drunken tavern brawl, in which the weapons are a bottle, a red-hot poker and a kettle of boiling water. After a mock-heroic battle, Jonathan proudly claims victory over his opponent, a coffee-room orator who had criticized the king's speech:

I used my poker as a cut and thrust, and singed and carbonadoed him with a vengeance, till the fire having reached the tail of his peruke [which Jonathan has earlier impaled on the poker] I looked like a god armed with a comet, and the enemy could stand it no longer. He ran off, leaving me master of the field of battle, and my scalded legs rendered me incapable of pursuit. So ended an action in which I revenged my insulted sovereign, and which I may without vanity call the *hottest* of the whole war. (62-3)

Beneath the comedy, however, a serious anti-war agenda is clearly discernible, and it is arguable that *Jonathan Corncob*'s boisterous narrative is no less effective in transmitting this message than the sentimental

effusions of *Emma Corbett* or the strident political rhetoric of *Reveries of the Heart*. Jonathan's wide-ranging career provides the opportunity for a subversive critique of the war that extends beyond the satirical observations that shape each separate episode. The contrived and fantastical plot, which denies the hero's agency and subjects him to the workings of a ludicrous serendipity that often verges on the malign, is also a compelling symbol of individual powerlessness and victimhood in the face of state-sponsored violence.

#### *Tories and Rebels*

Americans who supported the Revolution styled themselves Whigs and patriots, though their opponents called them rebels, whilst those who remained loyal to the Crown were known as Tories. *Jonathan Corncob* reflects the tensions between the two communities and casts a shrewd and sceptical eye over the parochial institutions through which they were expressed. Apart from one humorous reference to the arguments over taxation that provoked the Boston Tea Party, there is no mention of the political differences between the two parties. Instead, the novel provides a satirical account of a divided society that foregrounds the ignorance, avarice and incompetence of combatants and bystanders alike, on both sides of the

ideological divide. This representation is conveyed entirely through the comic ironies of the plot, without authorial or narratorial intervention, so the liveliness of the work is never diminished by didactic explication. However, in the clash between the novel's protagonists and the malign forces with which they become entangled, the reader's sympathies are invariably engaged on the side of the unfortunate individual.

When Jonathan is censured by his local Committee for transgressing the laws of bundling, the reader knows (although the Committee may not) that he has been seduced by Desire and ought to be viewed as a victim rather than as an offender. After Jonathan's departure his father falls prey to the same parochial bureaucracy, but on this occasion it is clear that the Committee conspires to perpetrate a gross miscarriage of justice. Habakkuk has purchased some livestock from a neighbour using a fifty dollar bill that is subsequently found to be counterfeit. His neighbours accuse him of forging the note himself, although, as Habakkuk explains, everyone knows that he could not have committed the crime:

The committee ... was of opinion, that as I had passed it, I must consequently have forged it, though, as you know, I never could write in my life; the committee knew it too, but the president had long had an inclination to become possessor of Squatcock farm: I was therefore declared an enemy of the state, all my effects were ordered to be confiscated, and I was sentenced to be set astride on the gallows three different market days. (107)

On temporary release from prison to visit his family, who have resettled near Vermont, Habakkuk encounters an even more brutal expression of parochial ‘justice’. The local community take ‘more pleasure in hunting a tory than in hunting a *skunk*’ (108) and force him to run the gauntlet ‘according to the laudable custom of the Indians’ (109). This brutal form of punishment also prevailed in European naval and military practice, but here it is expressly associated with Native American custom and thus resonates with specifically colonial barbarity. Habakkuk thinks himself lucky to escape with one broken arm, two broken collarbones and a fractured skull.

Habakkuk’s experience exemplifies the partial and arbitrary nature of community justice and the harsh treatment meted out to many Loyalist sympathisers during the war years. It also reverberates with the anxieties of the post-war crisis in Massachusetts, where Shays’ rebellion had recently brought the plight of poor American farmers to public attention.<sup>21</sup> Daniel Shays was a former officer in the revolutionary army, and in September 1786 he and more than a thousand other small farmers marched to the courthouse in Springfield to protest against the proposed seizure of their property for the non-payment of debts and taxes. Their problems were caused by a disastrous fall in the value of paper currency, and a recurrent anxiety about the value of paper money resonates throughout *Jonathan*

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<sup>21</sup> E. Wayne Carp, ‘Demobilization and National Defense’, in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 383-8 (pp. 385-6).



*Corncob*. The counterfeit bill that is the instrument of Habakkuk's downfall is a symbol of that anxiety: it leads directly to his imprisonment and the confiscation of his farm. In the immediate post-war years, many Massachusetts smallholders feared a similar fate when they were threatened with foreclosure for failing to meet tax demands that had to be paid in coin.

Despite his youth and inexperience, Jonathan is quick to recognize the value of hard currency. He finances his flight from Desire by collecting all the 'brown paper-money of the Congress' that he can lay his hands on, and persuading British prisoners on parole to exchange it for 'twenty hard dollars', which are 'a rarity in that country' (23). Once his cash is spent, however, Jonathan has to make do with paper currency like everyone else, and his irreverent handling of it once again brings him into conflict with the revolutionary authorities. On his return to Boston after a spell of privateering, Jonathan receives a stack of congressional currency as his share of the prize money. While waiting to be served in a Boston shop, he observes an old gentleman ceremoniously opening his pocket book to pay for a skein of thread:

[he] untied half a dozen knots, undid as many turns of green binding, opened the pocket-book with great caution and deliberation, and at length produced a bill of the congress for six-pence. The money of the congress had at this time lost three-fourths of its original value. (35)

Jonathan's own bills, in contrast, are crumpled up inside his pocket 'as if they had been waste-paper' (35). When the elderly shopper taxes him with

making light of his money, Jonathan tosses the bills in the air to demonstrate their lack of weight. The old man assumes that Jonathan is one of those villains who ‘depreciate the money of the state’ (36) and reports him to the Boston Committee of Safety, who construe his jocularly as high treason and imprison him in the town gaol. Whether Jonathan acts naively or deliberately is not clear, but his disparagement of the official currency of the new republic is a subversive attack on a key symbol of nationhood.

#### *The British Dimension*

Although *Jonathan Corncob* disparages American parochialism in general, and the climate of revolutionary zeal that characterized Boston in particular, it is equally scathing about certain aspects of British culture. Some of the most trenchant criticism in the novel is directed at the army and navy, whose officers are portrayed as boastful, cowardly, cruel and incompetent, and whose institutional practices are shown to be both stupid and inhumane. After his arrival in New York Jonathan joins a group of displaced Loyalists who steal cattle to sell to the British army, a career that inspires his appreciation of the skill and audacity with which the king’s Hessian troops plunder the local population:

Whenever the troops of that nation saw any thing in an American house which suited them, they begged it in a civil way; though at the

same time using an argument that was unanswerable — ‘If you vas one frynd to the Koning’, said Lieut. *Hastendudenrot* of the *Trumbrick* regiment, ‘you vas give me your vatch; if you vas one repell, by Got I take it’. (72)

The logic of an argument that conflates patriotism and plunder is both irrefutable and irresistible, and Jonathan is particularly impressed to learn that the simple expedient of requesting the items that they intend to plunder saves the Hessians from the charge of marauding, which is a capital offence.

More needy and less sophisticated felons are not so fortunate, however, as Jonathan discovers when he witnesses the execution of a Highland soldier who has been caught foraging for food to assuage his hunger and is hanged for stealing ‘two cabbages and three beet-roots’. Jonathan takes some comfort from the belief that corrupt contractors and suppliers who commit fraud on a much larger scale will suffer a similar fate, until a more knowledgeable bystander enlightens him:

You see that this is so far from being a robbery *vi et armis*, as in the case of the cabbages and beet-roots, that every thing is carried on in the most regular manner possible; and if you think that this way of disposing of the public money is extraordinary, please to recollect that it is precisely for this reason, that the sums voted to answer these demands are called army-extraordinaries, and navy-extraordinaries. (69-70)

The novel’s account of the ways in which in which agents, contractors and commanders conspire to divert public funds into their own pockets exposes

the double standards of a society that thrives on speculation and patronage but exacts savage retribution on those who steal merely in order to survive.

The first of Jonathan's several encounters with the Royal Navy takes place on a vessel in Boston Bay, where his attempts to save the ship from a fire that has started in one of the storerooms are thwarted by the officers' refusal to take account of information that has not passed through the proper chain of command. The second ship in which he serves is captained by a quarrelsome drunkard who becomes a tyrant when opposed, whilst the third is commanded by a boastful coward who seeks every excuse to surrender rather than fight. Taken together, these episodes present a highly comic but trenchantly critical portrayal of the navy, satirizing its hierarchical structure as authoritarian and inflexible, its disciplinary system as savage and arbitrary, and its officers as cowardly, ineffective, drunken and quarrelsome. This is very much the same critique that is found, in extended and emotionally more powerful form, in *Roderick Random* (1748).<sup>22</sup> *Jonathan Corncob*'s comic lampoons and Smollett's unflinchingly realistic accounts inhabit different literary landscapes but they share a similar satirical agenda.

Although comic in expression, the criticisms offered in *Jonathan Corncob* are politically significant. Throughout the eighteenth century the navy was the keystone of national security and imperial influence, and was widely regarded as the guarantor of the nation's liberty and independence.

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<sup>22</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, ed. by David Blewett (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

Unlike the army, which was feared as a potential instrument of absolutism, the navy ‘commanded broad-based approval as an instrument of policy’.<sup>23</sup> The heroes of naval engagements were celebrated as icons of patriotism and even as the American War drew to a dismal close, Admiral Rodney’s victory at The Saints provided the nation with a consolatory opportunity for patriotic display.<sup>24</sup> Yet the patriotism exhibited by the naval officers in *Jonathan Corncob* is largely a bellicose façade. Its belligerent intent is perfectly encapsulated in the fervent prayer offered by one of the captains incarcerated with Jonathan in the prison ship in Boston harbour:

O L—d our father, which art in heaven, of thy infinite goodness and mercy, look down, and d—n, c—se, bl—t, blow, burn, blind, sink, and utterly destroy the thirteen united states of America. (158)

In the naval circles represented in the novel, pugnacious rhetoric is a symbol of poor performance rather than patriotic endeavour, and displays of verbal aggression are satirical signifiers of cruelty or cowardice. Given the importance of the Royal Navy in maintaining Britain’s control over her overseas empire, this suggests a certain lack of belief in the imperial project itself.

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<sup>23</sup> Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence*, pp. 201-2.

### *The Trauma of Displacement*

The traumatic displacement and loss of identity experienced by American Loyalists is represented not only in the adventures of Jonathan himself, but also in the wartime career of his bundling partner, Desire Slawbunk, who passes from one protector to another in her struggle for survival. Striving to attract every likely defender, and cruelly mistreated by them all, Desire first marries a British officer and then becomes the mistress of the man who kills him, a renegade Irishman fighting with the revolutionary army. When the Irishman is hanged as a deserter, Desire mourns his passing:

Though he beat me regularly once a day, there was something so affectionate in his manner of making peace at night, that I could not help regretting his loss. (172)

Her next protector is much less to her taste:

I afterwards fell into the hands of a Hessian corporal, who was likewise a deserter. This gentleman put a basket on my back, filled it with potatoes, cabbages, plunder, and a camp kettle, and made me march till I fainted with fatigue, while he walked by my side with all the majesty possible, his pipe in his mouth, and his cane hanging upon one of his coat buttons. (172-3)

Following her escape from this exploitive guardian, Desire is plundered of her clothes by a British naval lieutenant, tarred and feathered on the orders of the Boston Committee of Safety, and finally consigned to the town gaol, where she effects a reunion with Jonathan by breaking down the wall that divides their two cells.

It is clear that Desire is not an entirely innocent victim of the war, although she often tries to present herself in that guise. She is partly the agent of her own fate, at least to the extent that she lavishes her sexual charms on all who come within her orbit. Jonathan himself directs the reader towards an awareness of her manipulative intentions, both in his initial refusal to be trapped into marriage and in his angry reaction to Desire's account of her easy submission to the Irish soldier who killed her husband:

'I was so intimidated by what I saw [her husband's murder], that I no longer opposed any resistance to the intentions of the Irishman, who triumphed over my virtue. You, my dear Jonathan, may easily imagine what my feelings must have been on such an occasion.'

'It is not at all difficult to divine what they were, madam,' answered I a little angrily; 'but pray go on.' (170-1)

However, although Desire seems to pass imperturbably from one side of the dispute to the other and to make herself equally at home on both sides of the enemy line, in reality she has no standing in either camp. Her frantic promiscuity expresses the realities of the Loyalist struggle for survival, whilst Jonathan's angry scorn echoes the cynicism with which many metropolitan observers dismissed the tribulations of their American supporters.

Desire's lack of agency reflects the vulnerable position of most American Loyalists both during and after the war. While they remained in

America, they lived in constant fear of terrorist reprisals. After the war they led an equally precarious existence as they struggled to establish new lives in Britain, Canada, the British Caribbean or West Africa. The exact number of Loyalists who were forced to leave America is not known but most estimates range between sixty and a hundred thousand, and Keith Mason has suggested that ‘regardless of their precise background and status, [the refugees] shared a perception that they had suffered from persecution and discrimination’.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hutchinson, erstwhile Governor of Massachusetts, spoke for many who took refuge in Britain when he reflected that:

We Americans are plenty here, and very cheap. Some of us at first coming, are apt to think ourselves of importance, but other people do not think so, and few, if any of us are much consulted, or enquired after.<sup>26</sup>

Henri Petter has suggested that the humour of *Jonathan Corncob* is intended to ‘transcend ... the painful aspect of the rupture between the colonies and Britain’, but this is perhaps an overly optimistic judgment.<sup>27</sup> Behind Jonathan’s comic account lies the very real trauma of displacement and loss experienced by many thousands of American Loyalists, and that disturbing force is never entirely absent from the text. Jonathan’s story remains unfinished and his fate unresolved, but he urges any reader who thinks his

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<sup>25</sup> Mason, ‘The American Loyalist Diaspora’, p. 242.

<sup>26</sup> Mason, ‘The American Loyalist Diaspora’, p. 248.

<sup>27</sup> Henri Petter, *The Early American Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 299.



adventures improbable to be wary of rejecting his account as untrue simply because it is fictional. *Jonathan Corncob* is a humorous satirical fantasy, but it is also a compelling imaginative enactment of the problems associated with a redundant imperial identity.

## Part Two: The 1790s

The American War afforded little opportunity for patriotic celebration in Britain, not only because it ended in ignominious defeat, but also because many Britons were uneasy about a civil war against fellow countrymen conducted with the help of Indian warriors and German mercenaries. Images that could transcend such anxieties were rare, and thus imbued with special significance. One of the sensations of 1784 was the exhibition in London of John Singleton Copley's newly completed painting, *The Death of Major Peirson*.<sup>1</sup> The work commemorates the death of a young British officer who was killed during the American War of Independence, when the French attempted to invade Jersey in January 1781. Copley's representation of the event, in the modern grand history style that Benjamin West had inaugurated with *The Death of General Wolfe*, drew huge crowds when it was exhibited in the Great Room at 28, Haymarket. At the centre of the picture space, Peirson, who led his men into battle in defiance of the governor's decision to surrender the island, expires under the Union Flag as his comrades fight on to victory. Prominent in the foreground, glancing

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<sup>1</sup> John Singleton Copley, *The Death of Major Peirson*, 1783 (The Tate Gallery, London).

backwards as they flee in terror from the scene, are a group of women and children, representatives of those in whose defence the gallant hero has just perished.



*The Death of Major Peirson*

The painting is epic both in size and concept, and its complex narrative is more than an exercise in historical reportage. The placement of the figures, the bold diagonals of flags and muskets, the swirling smoke and dramatic lighting convincingly replicate the chaos and confusion of the battle. But the primary focus of the work, and the main reason for its popularity, is

Peirson's heroic triumph over Britain's oldest enemy and his poignant death at the moment of victory.<sup>2</sup>

In Copley's painting political doubts and divisions are eclipsed by the glorious spectacle of a young soldier, audacious in battle and noble in death, valiantly defending hearth and home from foreign attack. Similarly idealized portrayals of British military masculinity characterize the poetic tributes to John André, General Eliott and Charles Asgill that appeared during the 1780s.<sup>3</sup> In the aftermath of a disastrous military campaign, consolatory depictions of the British officer as both martial hero and cultured man of feeling helped to obliterate the savagery of the conflict and to alleviate the bitterness of defeat. By the beginning of the 1790s, representations of military masculinity that are simultaneously heroic and sentimental in nature began to feature prominently in fictional accounts of the war.

As the 1780s drew to a close, the causes and conduct of the American War of Independence came to be seen as issues of past controversy rather than present exigency, and fictional engagement with the conflict began to reflect that change. The outbreak of the French Revolution

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed account of the painting and of Copley's preliminary sketches can be found in Richard Saunders, "'Genius and Glory': J S Copley's 'The Death of Major Peirson'", *American Art Journal*, 22 (1990), 5-39.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Anna Seward, *Monody on Major André* (Lichfield: J. Jackson, 1781) and *Ode on General Eliott's Return from Gibraltar* (London: T. Cadell, 1787); Catherine Upton, *The Siege of Gibraltar* (London: printed for the authoress, [1781]); Helen Maria Williams, *An Ode on the Peace* (London: T. Cadell, 1783).

brought new national preoccupations and, during the turbulent decade that followed, fictional accounts of the American War were gradually reshaped in response to changing cultural and political imperatives. *Caroline, The Heroine of The Camp*, H. Scott's *Helena; or, The Vicissitudes of a Military Life* and Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* were all published in 1790. They are transitional works, still absorbed in the anxieties of the conflict and the process of consolation and recuperation, but they also reflect, albeit obliquely, the heightened imaginative engagement with the process of regime change that was stimulated by the Regency Crisis of 1788-9 in Britain and the development of a new political order in France. By 1792, the impact of the French Revolution on fictional representations of the American War is clearly discernible, and in *Desmond* (1792) and *The Old Manor House* (1793), Charlotte Smith offers accounts of the conflict that justify the overthrow of the *ancien régime* in France and support a radical critique of the British state. In the mid-1790s, however, as Britain became engulfed in a new global war, Eliza Parsons' *The Voluntary Exile* (1795) focuses on the destructive impact of war on civilian populations. As the national crisis deepened and Britons became increasingly preoccupied with the threat of a French invasion, George Walker's *Cinthelia* (1797) not only records the horrors of naval and military conflict during the American War, but also identifies the French, rather than the rebellious colonists, as the primary enemy.

In this climate of anxiety, Copley's painting resonated anew. When the work was commissioned, the London print publisher, John Boydell, had retained the right to make reproductions but refrained from exercising his option immediately.<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1796, as Napoleon's troops were storming through Europe and William Tate was planning to land French soldiers in Pembrokeshire, that Boydell decided to commission an engraving and to sell the prints. Under the pressure of an escalating war with revolutionary France and the need for a patriotic response, Boydell was able to exploit the potential of Copley's painting to inspire new national endeavours. In the same way, over the course of the 1790s, novelists responded to changing political conditions at home and abroad and their fictional representations of the American War become infused with new kinds of meaning. That process is recorded in the following chapters.

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<sup>4</sup> The painting remained in Copley's hands and was sold to the Tate by his heirs in 1864.



## **Chapter 6: The Regulation of Violence**

### ***Caroline, The Heroine of the Camp (1790)***

*Caroline* was first published in May, 1790, in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution. The novel's conventional courtship narrative is set against the background of the British occupation of New York in the summer of 1776, and Burgoyne's Canadian expedition of 1777. The author revisits some of the controversies that surrounded the British campaign, offering both positive and negative images of military conduct and reflecting more widely on the nature of political authority. Looking back at the conduct of the war, he highlights several areas of concern, but these are counterbalanced by a celebratory account of patriotic enthusiasm and exemplary devotion to duty. Although the novel makes no explicit reference to the events of 1789, *Caroline* is not devoid of contemporary resonance. Its concern with the problematic nature of American Indian warfare, and British attempts to constrain it within the conventional terms of European military engagement, signals an awareness of the difficulties inherent in the regulation of certain kinds of violence that is particularly pertinent to the revolutionary process.



*Caroline* is unusually short by eighteenth-century standards. The novel consists of two slim volumes, each containing less than fifteen thousand words, and the author remains unidentified.<sup>1</sup> Its heroine is Caroline Thornton, the youngest daughter of an English peer, who travels to New York with her sister, Mrs Fitzjames, the wife of a colonel in the British army. Amongst the guests who frequent the colonel's house is Captain Courtney, a newly enrolled volunteer noted for his courage, enthusiasm and generosity. Caroline is impressed by Courtney's adventurous spirit and enlightened views, but Mrs Fitzjames is anxious to promote a marriage between Caroline and Lord Belandine, a wealthy aristocrat with powerful political connections. She is therefore relieved when Belandine covertly contrives to have Courtney sent on an embassy to the Outawa Indians in Canada, whose support is thought to be essential to the success of Burgoyne's forthcoming expedition.

When the novel first appeared, the *Critical Review* commented that the eponymous Caroline 'has no great right to the name of heroine, for she remains quietly at New York, in peace from all attacks but those of love'.<sup>2</sup> However, the relationship between the novel's courtship narrative and its wartime setting is richer and more complex than the reviewer suggests.

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<sup>1</sup> The flyleaf of the Harvard copy of the 1830 edition carries a pencilled note attributing the work to a London printer named Dennett Jaques. This attribution was accepted by Heilman and on the strength of that acceptance Harvard Library catalogues the work under Jaques's name. However, Heilman appears to have been unaware of the existence of an earlier edition that was printed by Jaques, and in the absence of any corroborative evidence the attribution must remain speculative. See Heilman, *America in English Fiction*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Critical Review*, 70 (1790), p. 97.

Whilst *Caroline* offers no overt analysis of the imperial/colonial relationship, it exploits connections between the courtship narrative and the public events against which it takes place to question the nature of political authority. Because the ties between the metropolis and its colonial dependencies were largely understood and expressed in familial terms, the relationship between Caroline and her father resonates with political implication. Caroline relies on her father to save her from Belandine's unwanted advances:

My father I am confident will never make use of authority to compel me to an acquiescence which my nature revolts at, to an alliance that would lay a foundation of perpetual misery to myself, and of regret and trouble to him.<sup>3</sup>

However, the dynastic view of marriage espoused by Caroline's father and sister places family advantage above personal feeling, exemplifying the authoritarian constructions of family and empire that underpinned British attempts to coerce the American colonies into submission. In the event, the novel shows that Caroline's confidence in her father's willingness to respect her feelings is as sadly misplaced as that of the colonists who thought they could rely on George III to remedy their grievances.

Caroline's two suitors represent opposing political interests. Captain Courtney's descent from an ancient family of landowners with a long

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<sup>3</sup> *Caroline, The Heroine of the Camp*, 2 vols (London: W. Beilby, 1790), I, 95-6. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

tradition of social responsibility identifies him as a representative of Country Party values. His father's estate is small:

But as he delighted rather in beholding and administering to the happiness of his tenantry than in enjoying the more popular applause which arises from embarking in political disputes, his income was adequate to the stile in which he lived. (I, 2)

This economical account establishes the Courtneys as belonging to the class of independent country landowners who were regarded as the true guardians of the national interest. With his father's permission, Courtney volunteers for the army and wins promotion through acts of personal bravery, adopting 'a character his ancestors had often filled with distinguished honor' (I, 7). His courage, liberality and warm-hearted sensibility are recognizable 'country' virtues.

Lord Belandine, on the other hand, is a wealthy lord with a taste for horseracing, whose villainous character – devious, manipulative and self-interested – is associated with his aristocratic status. Significantly, he has risen in the navy by supporting the interest of the ministry:

His Lordship was early entered in the navy; and as his guardians had always supported the interest of the Minister with all the influence his property gave them, and as he had pursued the same line of politics since the time he came of age, he had been early promoted to the command of a line of battle ship. (I, 19-20)

His advancement is not a mark of personal or professional merit but is the result of prolonged engagement with the world of politics and patronage.

The rivalry between Caroline's suitors reflects contemporary anxieties about the undue and potentially malign influence of an aristocratic elite whose political interest is exercised at the highest level:

The interest of his Lordship [Belandine] with the Commander in Chief was very considerable. He often dined at his table, where he was much caressed and attended to; for the influence of his Lordship with the Ministry was serviceable to the interested purposes of the General.  
(I, 110)

This allusion to the way in which even the most senior officers depended on political influence hints at the lobbying and jostling for position that was endemic within the eighteenth-century military establishment.

### *Revisiting controversy*

The fictional after-life of the American War of Independence was sustained by a plethora of military memoirs and histories that appeared throughout the 1780s and continued into the following decade.<sup>4</sup> In 1789, when Thomas Anburey published an account of his experiences as a member of

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<sup>4</sup> See, amongst others, Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition*; Lord Howe, *The Narrative of Lieut. Gen. Sir William Howe* (London: H. Baldwin, 1780); Sir Henry Clinton, *The Narrative of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Clinton, K. B.* (London: J. Debrett, 1783); John Graves Simcoe, *A Journal of the Operations of the Queen's Rangers, From the End of the Year 1777 to the Conclusion of the Late American War* (Exeter: 1787); Anburey, *Travels*; Ramsay, *A History of the American Revolution*; Charles Stedman, *A History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (London: J. Murray, J. Debrett and J. Kirby, 1794).

Burgoyne's Canadian expedition, the *Critical Review* noted that the war was an 'old obsolete story', but that many writers continued to believe that the public 'should be acquainted with, and sensible of the merits of each party'.<sup>5</sup> The social and military elite were particularly enthusiastic purchasers of such works, and Anburey's account attracted six hundred subscribers, including four royal dukes and ninety-nine peers of the realm, despite the fact that much of his material was transcribed from previously published sources.<sup>6</sup>

In many cases, the published memoirs of returning generals continue the political and strategic wrangling that characterized the war in America. Personal rivalries were always an issue, but were particularly rife during the winter of 1776-7 and contributed in no small measure to the disastrous outcome of Burgoyne's expedition. While Sir William Howe remained in New York writing to the Secretary of State about his military objectives for the following year, Burgoyne spent the winter in England, lobbying strenuously, and in the end successfully, for an alternative plan of campaign. Howe's primary objective was to mount an attack on Philadelphia in the hope of bringing Washington to a decisive engagement, whereas the success of Burgoyne's Canadian expedition depended on a rendezvous with Howe's forces somewhere in the region of Albany. Howe denied that he had ever

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<sup>5</sup> *Critical Review*, 68 (1789), p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> Anburey, *Travels*; for an authoritative account of Anburey's borrowings, see Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., 'Thomas Anburey's "Travels Through America": A Note on Eighteenth-Century Plagiarism', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 37 (1943), 23-36.

received orders to support Burgoyne, and his military operations in Pennsylvania prevented him from doing so. Although *Caroline* shows Howe acting to promote the embassy to the Outawa Indians on which the success of Burgoyne's campaign is thought to depend, the way in which Belandine contrives to manipulate the event tends to substantiate the opposition's repeated accusations that the conduct of the war was marred by political chicanery and the pursuit of private goals.

The author's account of life in occupied New York shows the officers of the British army engrossed by fashionable entertainments rather than engaged in military activity. This echoes contemporary criticisms of the dilatory nature of Howe's conduct of the campaign and his fondness for social pursuits.<sup>7</sup> On her arrival in New York, Mrs Fitzjames is agreeably surprised to find herself 'in the midst of so many men of wit and fashion' (I, 10). Military activity is confined to foraging expeditions or occasional skirmishes, and enjoyment is the order of the day. Dinners, parties and excursions provide constant amusement, and such events are by no means lacking in cosmopolitan refinement. When Lord Belandine invites Caroline and a group of other friends to join him in a cruise:

they sailed round the British fleet, and went on board the ship which Lord Belandine commanded; where they partook of an elegant repast which his Lordship had provided. (I, 24)

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Israel Mauduit, *Strictures on the Philadelphia Mischianza or Triumph Upon Leaving America Unconquered* (London: J. Bew, 1779) and Stedman, *A History of the American War*, I, 241-2.

The imprimatur for such gatherings is provided by Howe, whose daily *levée* is a quasi-courtly ritual, reinforcing his position at the apex of a social and military hierarchy that faithfully reproduces the structures of metropolitan society.

The army's culture of recreation and entertainment played a part in this process. Throughout the war, British occupation of cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia was the signal for a hectic season of social and theatrical events that acted as the showcase for the values of a fashionable patrician elite. In Boston, the British converted Faneuil Hall, where the Sons of Liberty had gathered to plan a campaign of colonial resistance to imperial oppression, into a playhouse. In the winter of 1775-6, when the city was under siege, the theatrical programme included several plays by Shakespeare and a production of Burgoyne's satirical comedy *Maid of the Oaks*, as well as his newly written farce, *The Blockade of Boston*, which was rudely interrupted on the opening night by an unexpected rebel attack.<sup>8</sup> When the army was stationed in New York, the military establishment sponsored a range of entertainments, including supper parties, balls, theatrical performances and firework displays.<sup>9</sup> However, perhaps the most spectacular of all the glittering occasions

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The War for America 1770-1781* (London: Grafton, 1990; repr. Penguin, 2001), p. 72; David McCullough, *1776: America and Britain at War* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 74-5.

<sup>9</sup> Jared Brown, *The Theatre in America during the Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

designed to mark imperial superiority was the Philadelphia *Mischianza*, an entertainment devised by officers of the British army to mark Howe's retirement from the post of Commander-in-Chief in the summer of 1778. Hundreds of guests were conveyed down the Delaware in a parade of decorated barges and galleys to view an elaborate medieval tournament in which British officers, designated as Knights of the Blended Rose and Knights of the Burning Mountain, competed for the favours of the loyalist ladies of Philadelphia. The celebrations culminated in a supper and ball held in specially constructed pavilions made bright with mirrors and chandeliers borrowed from the inhabitants of the city.<sup>10</sup>

Such events reinforced British and loyalist belief in their own political and cultural supremacy but they also provided a focal point around which opposition to the war, both in Britain and America, could crystallize and rally. Many commentators took the opportunity to draw a contrast between the corrupt manners of the old world and the simple virtues of the new, often drawing on the rhetoric of civic humanism to argue that luxury and display were the harbingers of decadence and thus inimical to the public good. Only a few weeks after the *Mischianza*, as the American army harassed the British on their withdrawal from Philadelphia, General Wayne wrote to a correspondent in the city:

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<sup>10</sup> *Annual Register 1778*, 264-70.



Tell those Philadelphia ladies who attended Howe's assemblies and levees, that the heavenly, sweet, pretty redcoats — the accomplished gentlemen of the guards and grenadiers, have been humbled on the plains of Monmouth. The knights of the Blended Roses and of the Burning Mount — have resigned their laurels to rebel officers, who will lay them at the feet of *those* virtuous daughters of America who cheerfully gave up ease and affluence in a city, for liberty and peace of mind in a cottage.<sup>11</sup>

The author of *Caroline* is clearly anxious about some of the values displayed by the British military elite. Courtney chafes constantly at the inactive state of the army and the British failure to capitalize on their success. He spends some of his leisure moments collecting material for a projected history of the war, which will have to find some way of accounting for this lack of vigour:

It will require no small share of genius to give a sufficiently descriptive account of the proceedings of the army so as to convince our countrymen at home that we have not been idle in the business we were sent out to accomplish. (I, 103)

Moreover, although Courtney remains convinced that 'the duty he owed to his country and to his king called on him to draw his sword in the present contest', he also consoles himself and Caroline with 'imaginary means' of pursuing the imperial agenda 'without the destructive consequences of war in general' (I, 17). These oblique hints are a reminder of the widespread

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1900), I, 217.

concern felt in Britain about some of the measures adopted during the conflict, which still resonated more than ten years later.

### *The Regulation of Violence*

The British use of Indian warriors in their attempt to subdue the American colonists was one of the most bitterly contested and highly propagandized issues of the war and *Caroline* is the only eighteenth-century novel I am aware of that attempts to gloss the policy in a positive manner. In the aftermath of sensationalist press coverage of Indian atrocities during the Seven Years War, British perceptions of American Indians were overwhelmingly negative, and remained so during the War of Independence.<sup>12</sup> However, as Fred Anderson points out, the experience of the Seven Years War also appeared to demonstrate that in wilderness warfare ‘there could be no success without the cooperation, or at least the acquiescence, of the Indians’.<sup>13</sup> This perception informed British military thinking at the outset of the American War. However, it failed to anticipate the revulsion that would arise when the fearsome violence of Indian warriors was unleashed on American colonists, who were widely regarded

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<sup>12</sup>Troy Bickham, *Savages Within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. pp 65-109.

<sup>13</sup>Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America 1754-1766* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), p. 107.

as fellow countrymen, rather than the hated French. Caroline's reaction on learning of Courtney's mission is representative of the general distaste with which the Indian alliances were regarded in Britain, even by those who argued their necessity:

It was, she thought, sending him on a commission where fame was not to be acquired, and where he ran additional hazard of losing his life. Society would be a stranger to him, and the customs and peculiarities of the people to whom he was to be sent, would disgust him. It was as it were burying him alive, and she shuddered at the idea that she might never see him more. (I, 119-20)

Even Burgoyne professed unease at 'the caprice, the superstition, the self-interestedness' of allies whom he would later dismiss as unreliable.<sup>14</sup>

In presenting the fictional account of Courtney's mission to the Outawas, *Caroline* adheres closely to the well known events of Burgoyne's campaign and includes a brief précis of the general's celebrated address to the Indians who assembled at the camp on the banks of the River Bouquet on 21 June 1777. The speech was extensively reported and was printed verbatim in many accounts of the campaign, creating widespread familiarity with the terms of engagement that Burgoyne sought to impress on his Indian allies.<sup>15</sup> In the novel, however, the character of the address is completely transformed by the third person narration, which removes all trace of the bombastic rhetoric that is the main distinguishing feature of the original.

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<sup>14</sup> Burgoyne, *State of the Expedition*, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Annual Register 1777*, p. 146; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 48 (1778), pp. 122-3; Burgoyne, *State of the Expedition*, pp. xii-xiv; Anburey, *Travels*, I, 280-8.

Burgoyne's oration ran to nearly a thousand words and culminated in a lofty call for the Indians to obey the British officers who had been put in charge of them:

Bear immoveable in your hearts this solid maxim, it cannot be too deeply impressed, that the great essential reward, worthy service of your alliance, the sincerity of your zeal to the King your father, and never-failing protector, will be examined, and judged upon the test only of your steady and uniform adherence to the order and counsels of those to whom his Majesty has intrusted the direction and the honour of his arms.<sup>16</sup>

Although it faithfully reproduces the sense of the original, the novel's simplified account removes Burgoyne's rhetorical flourishes and eschews his grandiloquent language:

He positively forbid them to shed blood when they were not opposed in arms, and told them that aged men, women, children, and prisoners, must be held sacred from the knife or hatchet, even in the time of actual conflict. In short by every argument he could use, and every inducement he could offer, he strove to impress them with an opinion of the necessity there was to be directed by the officers who were sent by the Great King, their common father, and who otherwise wished not for their assistance. (II, 100-1)

The final clause is an authorial addition and although it clearly reflects Burgoyne's sentiments on the occasion it also serves to emphasize the British determination to curb the excesses associated with Indian methods of warfare that Courtney's mission is designed to illustrate.

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<sup>16</sup> Burgoyne, *State of the Expedition*, p. xiii.

Burgoyne's address to the Indians, like his earlier Proclamation to the inhabitants of the territories he was about to invade, was fiercely attacked on both sides of the Atlantic. The Americans were quick to seize a propaganda advantage, lampooning Burgoyne's call for restraint as, at best, ineffectual, and at worst, as dishonest and cynical. They were particularly keen to point out that many of the scalping knives used by the Indians had been supplied by the British, as Wheeler Case reminded his readers in 1778:

Thousands of *Indians* I've supplied with knives,  
To scalp your dearest children and your wives;  
If I but nod the savage army flies,  
And naught is heard but shrieks and female cries.<sup>17</sup>

The Whig opposition at Westminster had condemned the use of Indians from the outset and poured scorn on Burgoyne's attempts to moderate their mode of warfare. On 6 February 1778, Burke raised the question of the British employment of 'irregular forces' and 'savage allies' in the House of Commons, addressing the issue in a speech that the *Parliamentary Register* reported as 'the very best [he] had ever delivered'.<sup>18</sup> Burke acknowledged the good intentions of Burgoyne's speech, but was frankly sceptical about the possibility of control:

[He] painted it in a ludicrous light ... he said, it was rational and proper, if applied to any other; but as it was applied to savages, to

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<sup>17</sup> Wheeler Case, *Revolutionary Memorials*, ed. by Stephen Dodd (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1852), p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Parliamentary Register* (London: J. Almon, 1775-80), VIII, 352.

whom it must be perfectly unintelligible and without the least effect, it might as well have been applied to the wild beasts of the forest.<sup>19</sup>

*Caroline* seeks to refute these accusations, partly through a rehearsal of the exculpatory arguments put forward by Burgoyne and his supporters which is lent authority by the informed and apparently objective narratorial voice, and partly through the fictional account of Courtney's embassy to the Outawas, which substantiates Burgoyne's claim that the use of British officers had proved effective in restraining indiscriminate slaughter.

Courtney's initial reservations on being selected for such an unusual mission reflect the widespread British unease about Burgoyne's Indian alliances, but he consoles himself with the thought that it is a soldier's duty not to flinch from 'the execution of any service however hazardous or disagreeable' (I, 115). In describing the way in which British officers carried out an important but distasteful task, *Caroline* follows the official accounts of the expedition. Burgoyne himself recorded that the British officers employed in the military supervision of his Indian allies were 'gentlemen of the highest integrity', and diligent in their supervision of the distribution of 'Indian necessities and presents'.<sup>20</sup> This diligence is illustrated in the novel by the care that Courtney and Captain Morton exercise to ensure that the articles designed as goodwill presents arrive in perfect order. The exact nature of the gifts is not specified, however, and any suggestion that they

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<sup>19</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, VIII, 350.

<sup>20</sup> Burgoyne, *State of the Expedition*, p. 99.

might have included scalping knives is discreetly ignored. When the building in which the gifts are stored is subject to water damage, Morton and Courtney order everything to be unpacked and carefully examined, since the Indians ‘might, if they found them in an injured state, not hasten their assistance so readily’ (II, 21). The damage has been deliberately contrived by Courtney’s admirer, Madame de Retelle, who wishes to prolong his stay in Montreal for romantic reasons but whose French nationality adds a significant political dimension to her act of sabotage. Her private agenda threatens the success of Courtney’s military embassy, and mirrors the self-interested and subversive motives of the French interpreters whom Burgoyne blamed for the ultimate disaffection and desertion of his Indian forces.<sup>21</sup>

The anxiety surrounding Burgoyne’s Indian alliances was rooted in a universal perception of the savagery of Indian methods of warfare. The *Annual Register* for 1777 reiterates the widely held conviction that the ‘object and design’ of Indian warfare was ‘not to fight, but to murder; not to conquer but to destroy’.<sup>22</sup> The same complaint can be found in the *Declaration of Independence*, which charges George III with endeavouring ‘to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *Annual Register* 1777, p. 144.

sexes, and conditions'.<sup>23</sup> Few fictional accounts of the war waste the opportunity to refer to atrocities that so dramatically embodied the barbarity and unnaturalness of war in general, and of civil war in particular.

It is likely that all readers of *Caroline* would have been familiar with the story of Jane Macrea, whose cruel and untimely death, supposedly at the hands of Burgoyne's Indian allies, was one of the most symbolic and highly contested events of the war.<sup>24</sup> Few of the facts of this *cause célèbre* are known for certain, other than that Jane was a young American woman living near Fort Edward, who had brothers engaged on both sides of the conflict and who was engaged to be married to David Jones, an officer in a Loyalist regiment serving with Burgoyne. Most versions of the story agree that in July 1777 Jones sent a party of Indians to escort Jane to the British camp, although whether for safety, or to join a pleasure party on nearby Lake George, or because it was the day of their marriage, is hotly disputed. It is not known who killed her, nor whether the killing was deliberate or accidental; the Indians sent by Jones, a second party of Indian marauders, and a party of American soldiers have variously been blamed. What is

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<sup>23</sup> *Annual Register 1776*, p. 263.

<sup>24</sup> For contemporary accounts of the Macrea story see Anburey, *Travels*, I, 368-75; Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal*, pp. 145-7; James Wilkinson, *Memoirs of My Own Times*, 3 vols (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1816), I, 230-2; James Phinney Baxter, *The British Invasion from the North: The Campaigns of Generals Carleton and Burgoyne from Canada, 1776-1777, with the Journal of Lieut. William Digby of the 53<sup>rd</sup>, or Shropshire Regiment of Foot* (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1887), pp. 235-7. Additional sources are cited by Fliegelman, pp. 137-40.





*The Murder of Jane Macrea*

certain is that she was scalped, a fact that made her fate a matter of public concern when many other untimely deaths went unremarked.

Whilst Burgoyne denied that the British were in any way responsible for Jane's death, one fictional account of the story is in no doubt about where the real culpability lay. Michel René Hilliard d'Auberteuil's 1784 novella (written in French and probably published in Paris)<sup>27</sup> portrays the Indians as the innocent victims of British exploitation and blames their British officers for provoking violent behaviour:

The officers of Burgoyne's army kept these Indians continually intoxicated in order to increase their ferocity and to encourage them to murder and commit atrocities. These simple people did not love cruelty for its own sake but for the reward offered by the Europeans. It is not, then, upon them that our horror for the crimes should fall but upon the nations that provoked them, nations that dare to call themselves civilized.<sup>28</sup>

The differences between European and Indian standards of warfare feature in many fictional accounts of the war but *Caroline* is unique in placing the issue at the centre of its account and addressing it so explicitly. The author presents Burgoyne's address to the Indians as a sincere attempt to impress 'sentiments congenial to the humanity of his own heart, and to the method of waging war in civilized countries' on his unpredictable allies (II, 102).

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<sup>27</sup> Michel René Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Mis Mac Rea* [sic], roman historique, (Philadelphie [i.e. Paris?]: 1784).

<sup>28</sup> Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Miss McCrea: A Novel of the American Revolution*, trans. by E. LaGuardia (Gainesville, FL: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1958), p. 58.

Both the appeal to sensibility and the invocation of European cultural norms appear designed to counter the type of criticism levelled by Hilliard and by the American propagandists who used the Macrea affair to accuse Burgoyne of promoting the savage and indiscriminate slaughter of civilians. The American General Gates had taunted Burgoyne in particularly cutting terms, insinuating that his reputation as a member of the European social and cultural elite was tainted by complicity with barbarian practices:

That the savages of America should in their warfare mangle and scalp the unhappy prisoners is neither new nor extraordinary; but that the famous Lieutenant General Burgoyne, in whom the fine gentleman is united with the soldier and the scholar, should hire the savages of America to scalp Europeans, and the descendants of Europeans; nay more, that he should pay a price for each scalp so barbarously taken, is more than will be believed in Europe until authenticated facts shall in every gazette confirm the truth of the horrid tale.<sup>29</sup>

*Caroline* seeks to refute such allegations by showing that the use of Indians was rendered acceptable through the imposition of European standards of warfare and the novel includes an scene in which Burgoyne meets the British officers in charge of the Indians and exhorts them to prevent any acts of savagery. On hearing this request, Courtney ‘felt great satisfaction in the post assigned to him, while so strictly required to support the war with the humanity of the European nations’ (II, 103).

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<sup>29</sup> Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal*, p. 155.

Although Courtney's period of service with the Indians is brief, it is structured to show these values at work. On the approach to Ticonderoga, Burgoyne's Indians are engaged in continual skirmishes in which Courtney's contingent 'behaved to the satisfaction of their Commander' (II, 104). After the Americans abandon the fort, the novel diverges from contemporary accounts, which claim that most of the Indians remained behind in Ticonderoga to drink and plunder, to show Courtney's party mounting an attack on an enemy outpost that was proving an obstacle to the British advance.<sup>30</sup> The Indians attack precipitately but fall back when the Americans, alerted by the noise, stand their ground. Courtney fights on, however, and is on the point of being captured when one of the Indian chiefs becomes aware of his danger and rallies his warriors to mount a counter-attack. The noise and impetuosity of the Outawas' initial attack, and the way in which they fall back as soon as they encounter resistance, had long been identified as characteristic of Indian methods of warfare, which were often dismissed as cowardly by eighteenth-century commentators.<sup>31</sup> The personal affection for Courtney that motivates the Indian counter-attack is also conventional, featuring in many captivity narratives and finding an anecdotal niche in several novels of the period.<sup>32</sup> However, in associating

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<sup>30</sup> Anburey, *Travels*, I, 355.

<sup>31</sup> Brumwell, *Redcoats*, pp. 204-6.

<sup>32</sup> For examples of Indian captivity narratives during the Seven Years War see Brumwell, *Redcoats*, pp. 168-79; for affectionate relationships between Indians and Europeans in novels of the period, see, for example, *The School for Fathers; or, The Victim of a Curse*, 3 vols (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1788), I, 225-40; Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor*

the Outawas' vigorous return to the fight with their devotion to Courtney, the narrative also implies an amelioration of their military practice that is attributable to the example of British martial heroism provided by their mentor. So strong is their affection, that when Courtney is wounded the Indians became enraged:

It was only by exertions which weakened him still more that he [Courtney] prevailed on them to refrain from exercising their revenge on the wounded Americans who lay in the field. (II, 107)

Although the primitive desire for revenge, which more sophisticated systems of warfare sought to regulate, remains unabated, Courtney's success in restraining the bloodthirsty intentions of his Outawa troops simultaneously argues the need for the measures that Burgoyne had insisted on, and argues their success. The efficacy of the policy is implied in the novel's suggestion that the civilizing influence of European military culture might even extend beyond the current crisis: on taking leave of Courtney, the Indian chiefs unite 'professions of the most friendly regard' with 'assurances of paying due obedience to the regulations they had been required to observe', even after his departure (II, 110).

Speaking in the immediate aftermath of Burgoyne's defeat, and more than a decade before *Caroline* was written, Burke took a very different

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*House*, ed. by Ina Ferris (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), pp. 324-31; Robert Bage, *Hermesprong* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2002), pp. 246-54; Harriet and Sophia Lee, *Canterbury Tales; or, The Year 1797. Volume the Third* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1799), pp. 33-48.

view of the matter, insisting that the Indian alliances had proved fatal to Burgoyne's campaign:

On the least appearance of ill success, they [the Indians] deserted; and often even turned their arms on their friends. That in falling upon all the inhabitants without discrimination, they made every man a soldier; and that the greatest part of the army (as it were conjured up against General Burgoyne) was raised by indignation and horror at the use of the savages; and to them the loss of a gallant European army under an accomplished general, was principally owing.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the speech Burke repeatedly stresses the difference between civilized, European forms of combat and an Indian method of making war 'which was so horrible that it shocked not only the manners of all civilized people, but far exceeded the ferocity of all barbarians mentioned in history'.<sup>34</sup> By the time *Caroline* appeared in 1790, it appeared to many observers that the barbarian 'other' was located in the heart of civilized Europe, rather than in the wilderness of America, and Burke himself was one of the first to give voice to the idea that the actions of the Paris mob and the proceedings of the French Assembly were 'savage and brutal'.<sup>35</sup> It is against the background of contemporary events in France, and particularly the march on Versailles in October 1789, that *Caroline's* implausible insistence on the ability of civilised societies to control the barbarians in their midst resonates most strongly. The issue of relative violence and

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<sup>33</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, VIII, 351.

<sup>34</sup> *Parliamentary Register*, VIII, 348.

<sup>35</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 68.

degrees of culpability will be picked up by Charlotte Smith in *Desmond* and *The Old Manor House*, but before exploring Smith's contribution to that debate, there are two more novels of 1790 that merit consideration.

## Chapter 7: The Irish Dimension

### *Helena; or, The Vicissitudes of a Military Life (1790)*

*Helena; or, The Vicissitudes of a Military Life* was published in 1790. It is the only novel in this study that can be shown to have originated outside England and to have been directed at a very specific circle of readers. Although it is in every sense a minor work, the circumstances surrounding its publication shed an unusually clear light on the way in which the events of the American War are recorded in the novel. This lends a degree of transparency to the relationship between ‘story’ and ‘history’ that is of particular interest to the literary scholar. Like the other works in this study, *Helena* exemplifies the way in which fictional accounts of the war are shaped in response to contemporary anxieties. The novel’s cultural and political resonance is inflected, above all, by its female authorship and Anglo-Irish identity, both of which are revealed by the discovery and correction of an authorial misattribution.



*The author and the readers*

Offering itself as the work of ‘an officer’s daughter’, *Helena* is an epistolary novel in two volumes, published by subscription and printed in Cork by James Haly in 1790. The dedication identifies the writer as ‘H. Scott’ and the novel is usually attributed to Dr Helenus Scott, author of *The Adventures of a Rupee*.<sup>1</sup> However, there is compelling evidence that this attribution is mistaken. According to the ‘Memoirs’ prefixed to *The Adventures of a Rupee*, Helenus Scott joined the East India Company after he completed his medical studies in Edinburgh. Following abortive attempts to travel to India in 1779 and 1780, he finally took up his post in 1782.<sup>2</sup> He was stationed in Bombay, where he eventually became head of the Medical Board, retiring to England ‘after an active and meritorious service of thirty years’.<sup>3</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that he returned to Britain during the intervening period, or that he ever had any connection with Ireland.

*Helena*, on the other hand, is unmistakably Irish in origin, one of six novels published by subscription in Cork in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Subscribers to the novel include local residents, doctors, clergymen, Members of Parliament and aristocratic patrons with

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<sup>1</sup> ESTC T84550; Raven and Forster, *The English Novel 1770-1799*, pp. 515-6; Heilman, *America in English Fiction*, pp. 110, 170, 477.

<sup>2</sup> Helenus Scott, *Adventures of a Rupee. A New Edition. To Which Are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author. And to Which There Are Annexed, His Remarks Concerning the Inhabitants of Africa* (London: John Murray, 1782), i-x.

<sup>3</sup> William Munk, *Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London: Comprising Biographical Sketches of All The Eminent Physicians Whose Names Are Recorded in the Annals* (London: Royal College of Physicians, 1878), III, 142.

<sup>4</sup> Raven and Forster, *The English Novel 1770-1799*, pp. 71-2.

strong Ascendancy connections. There are an unusually large number of sponsors from within the military establishment, particularly amongst the officers of the 47<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, then stationed in Cork, and the novel is dedicated to Lady Elizabeth Irving, the wife of their commanding officer. The subscription list appears to contain a small number of duplications, but as catalogued by Ruth Wallis, who takes every name at face value, it records three hundred and thirty one subscribers, of whom seventy are identifiable as army officers, and accounts for a total of five hundred and thirteen copies.<sup>5</sup> Haly reserved only twelve copies of the novel for his own bookshop, presumably judging that local demand would be fully satisfied through the subscription, but the Dublin bookseller, Patrick Byrne, subscribed for a hundred copies. This demonstrates some confidence in the commercial potential of the author's work – a recognition that the book's setting in America, Ireland and England, coupled with its military background and vivid account of the effect of the American War on the combatants' wives and families, would have held a particular attraction for the specific readership at which it appears to have been targeted. There is much to suggest that the novel could well have arisen out of personal experiences of the kind recorded within its pages, and that it may indeed be

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<sup>5</sup>P. J. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: Extended Supplement to the Revised Guide. Completed and Edited by Ruth Wallis* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: PHIBB, 1996), p.18.

the work of an officer's wife or daughter, possibly even a relation of the 'Captain Scott' who subscribed for six copies of the book.<sup>6</sup>

*Helena* is in many respects a conventional courtship novel which draws heavily, and often self-consciously, on Richardson for aspects of character, plot and form. However, the narrative also exhibits an unusual degree of freshness and immediacy in its account of the impact of the American War on the families of those involved. The novel recounts the experiences of Helena Courtenay, a young English girl whose father is an officer in a British regiment stationed in the West Indies. When Captain Courtenay is given leave to go to America to recuperate from a serious illness, the family settles in Philadelphia. Mrs Courtenay is unable to accompany her husband when he rejoins his regiment because their younger child has contracted smallpox, and when hostilities break out between Britain and America she and the two children are stranded in Philadelphia. Technically prisoners of war, they are refused permission to leave the city. These details are only gradually disclosed to the reader, however, and the novel opens without preamble in the autumn of 1776, at the moment when Congress, fearing an attack on Philadelphia in the wake of the British victories at Long Island and New York, decreed that all British prisoners should be removed from the city to a place of safety. The plot unfolds in a series of letters between Helena and her American friend and confidante,

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<sup>6</sup> [H. Scott], *Helena; or, The Vicissitudes of a Military Life*, 2 vols (Cork: James Haly, 1790), I, pp. v-xvi. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

Lucinda Franklin. Helena's letters tell of the prisoners' initial removal to Reading, sixty miles north of the city, their unexpected return to Philadelphia, and their subsequent journey to New York for exchange and eventual return to England. Her descriptions of the hardships that she and her companions endure are interspersed with fears for her father's safety, as she and her mother seek in vain to obtain news of him. In return, Lucinda relates the anxieties of the inhabitants of Philadelphia, her family's forced retreat to the countryside during the British occupation of the city, and the misfortunes of a loyalist friend whose father is found to have been corresponding with the British army.

*Helena* is not an overtly polemical novel; its narratives are essentially private and domestic in nature. The acknowledged agenda of its female-authored and feminocentric epistles is a moral one: to advocate uncomplaining, even cheerful, acceptance of the vicissitudes referred to in the title.<sup>7</sup> The arbitrary hazards of the Revolutionary War serve as an illustration of the extremes of fortune visited on earthbound mortals, a topical addition to the repertoire of dangers and disasters that the heroines of eighteenth-century novels routinely encounter. Before her story reaches its conventional happy ending, Helena endures the death of her young brother,

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<sup>7</sup>There appears to have been a minor literary vogue for such works in 1790. See, for example, *The Perfidious Guardian; or, Vicissitudes of Fortune. Exemplified in the History of Lucretia Lawson*, 2 vols (London: T Wilkins, 1790); W.W., *Reflections on the Vicissitudes of Time. In a Letter from a Brother to his Sister* (London: H. Trapp, 1790); *The Vicissitudes of Harlequin*, [London?], [1790?].

loses her lover on the eve of their marriage, is driven into penury through the failure of a lawsuit and narrowly escapes abduction and rape by a libertine admirer, in addition to her hardships in America. The novel's moral agenda is underpinned by the ideological significance that the author attaches to the historical events that form its background. Through its representation of the American War as a force that disrupts the harmony of familial relationships by separating fathers from their children, putting husbands and wives asunder, and dividing friends, the novel makes a political point about the nature of the imperial/colonial relationship. *Helena* reflects a construction of the Atlantic empire that is cooperative and familial rather than authoritarian and exploitative in nature, and mourns its loss.

### *Conflicts of allegiance*

*Helena* constructs the American revolutionary struggle as a crisis of allegiance and the novel's recurrent accounts of familial distress lament the disintegration of a transatlantic community bound together by the ties of sentimental sociability. The pre-war imperial/colonial relationship is construed in terms of a network of social and affective ties, idealized in the representation of the Franklins and the Courtenays, in which common interests are fostered and individual aspirations encouraged. The politics of

revolution destroys this harmonious equilibrium, subordinating mutual affection to its demand for partisan commitment. As Helena regrets the severing of her own sisterly relationship with Lucinda, she simultaneously laments the conflict that divides the imperial family and brings pain and suffering to those on both sides:

Oh! Lucinda how shocking are the effects of war, and what distress, is this unhappy country involved in! once so flourishing, now how striking the contrast; — the calamities I daily hear and see, inspire me with compassion for the unfortunate sufferers, and ardent wishes for the termination of this unnatural contest between the sister countries.  
(I, 26-7)

Earlier chapters have discussed the way in which late eighteenth-century discourses of imperial government and colonial revolution are commonly refigured as familial plots in which parental authority is challenged to accommodate filial aspirations.<sup>8</sup> *Helena*'s portrayal of the conflict as a contest between sisters is unusual and may reflect the novel's Anglo-Irish origins. The language of sisterhood was sometimes used to characterize the relationship of England to Wales and Scotland, but it was more commonly applied to Ireland, particularly after 1782, when the repeal of the Declaratory Act restored a measure of legislative freedom to the Irish parliament.<sup>9</sup> In this context, Scott's celebration of the sisterly relationship

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the chapters on *Emma Corbett* and *The Fair Syrian*.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Sir James Caldwell, *An Enquiry into How Far the Restrictions Laid upon the Trade of Ireland, by British Acts of Parliament, Are a Benefit or a Disadvantage to the British Dominions in General, and to England in Particular* (Exeter: Henry Mugg,

that links the English Helena Courtenay and the American Lucinda Franklin, and extends throughout their wider social network in England, America and Ireland, may be read as endorsing a similarly affective and non-patriarchal construction of empire.

This reading is supported by a central courtship narrative that pivots on sibling animosity rather than on filial rebellion. For the Franklins and the Courtenays the process of matrimonial choice is one of cooperation rather than confrontation, with parents and children agreeing on the paramount importance of the affections. Thus Mrs Courtenay supports Helena's decision to refuse an otherwise eligible offer of marriage from a suitor whose love she is unable to return:

I wish to see you my Helena, settled, — my life is very precarious, — it would be a dreadful thing to leave my child unprotected; but I will never desire you to put the least constraint on your inclinations. (I, 209)

Helena's subsequent attachment to Edward Grenville is warmly approved both by her mother and by Mrs Grenville, who join in consenting to Edward's request for an early private marriage when he is summoned to rejoin his regiment, even though his income will be small and their future uncertain. It is Edward's older brother and sister who conspire to prevent

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1779), p. viii; *Short Observations on the Necessity of Admitting Dublin to Participate in the Corn Export Bounties* (Dublin: Richard Moncrieffe, 1785), p. 19; *Thoughts on the Kingdom of Ireland, Written in the Year 1785; During the Debates in the British Parliament, on Certain Propositions, Commonly Called "The Irish Propositions"* (Bath: Crutwell, 1785), pp. 3, 5.

the marriage. As Helena describes it to Lucinda, Charles Grenville's self-centred and dissolutely independent lifestyle is the antithesis of the sentimental ideal of the mutually affective and cooperative family:

The eldest Mr Grenville is, by what I can learn, of a very unaimable [sic] character; he generally resides in the country, where he keeps a mistress; this entirely excludes his mother and sisters from his house. He has several children by this woman; and has, it seems, a strong aversion to marriage. Poor man, the name of freedom, it appears, is all he values; for I am told he is quite a slave to the caprices of this mistress. (II, 76-7)

For reasons that remain unexplained, but which are apparently linked to a rejection of established institutions in the name of 'freedom' and may therefore reflect fears of social disintegration inspired by the revolution debate in France, Charles Grenville arranges to have his brother arrested for debt only hours before the wedding is due to take place. His arbitrary and malevolent action is greeted with horror, but the perfidy of the sister who discloses the marriage plans to him attracts even greater censure. Helena laments behaviour that is so much 'unlike a sister' (II, 134), whilst Edward's younger sister, Jemima, is of the opinion that 'the duplicity of my sister is, if possible, more shocking than the open villainy of my brother' (II, 132). Whereas rivalry between brothers is perhaps to be expected, hostility on the part of a sister is both unexpected and unnatural.

For Helena and Lucinda, the conflict between 'sister countries' is equally un-sisterly and unnatural. From their separate vantage points, each



deplores the divisiveness of a war that severs families and separates friends, compelling everyone to take sides and many to take up arms, often against their will. There is no refuge in neutrality. Lucinda reveals that her father, a member of Congress whose sentiments ‘are in favour of the side he has taken’, holds a commission in the American army only because ‘it was not permitted him, to remain neuter’ (I, 53) whilst Helena recounts the difficulties facing British expatriates whose loyalties are divided. In Princeton, Helena and her companions breakfast with Mrs S—, the wife of a retired British officer who had sold his commission and settled in America at the end of the Seven Years War. His family prosper until the outbreak of hostilities:

His situation soon was very disagreeable, continually solicited by the Americans to join them in the defence of a country, naturalized to him from his long residence in it, and yet, how could he raise his arm against his majesty, whose commission he had borne so many years: — it was not to be thought of; — he wished, to remain neuter. (I, 44)

Torn by conflicting loyalties, Mr S— tries to resolve his personal moral dilemma by adopting a position of public neutrality and remaining on friendly terms with both sides. However, when it becomes known that he has dined with officers of the British army as they passed through Princeton, the Americans seize his cattle, pull down his enclosures, and make plans to arrest him. To avoid imprisonment Mr S— flees to New York, leaving his

wife and children on the farm but urging them to join him as soon as possible.

The political and ideological significance of such choices was fiercely contested. The concept of neutrality posed a considerable challenge to civic humanist values, as is evident from the way in which Samuel Johnson's apparently value-free definition of neutrality as 'a state of indifference; of neither friendship nor hostility' is inflected by the quotations from Addison and Swift with which he chose to illustrate it:

Men who possess a state of *neutrality* in times of publick danger, desert the common interest of their fellow-subjects. *Addison*

All pretences to *neutrality* are justly exploded, only intending the safety and ease of a few individuals, while the publick is embroiled.

This was the opinion and practice of the latter Cato. *Swift*<sup>10</sup>

There are, however, subtle and ambivalent gradations of attitude within the novel. There is, for example, a significant difference between the desire to 'remain neuter' attributed by Lucinda to her father, and that ascribed to Mr S— by Helena. Mr Franklin fully supports the American cause, he fulfils an important civic role as a member of Congress, and his reluctance to bear arms is excused by age. In contrast, Mr S—'s refusal to take sides represents a withdrawal from the obligations of citizenship, a privileging of private feeling over public duty.

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: J. and P. Knapton et al, 1755).

The privileging of private feeling over public obligation was commonly classed as a female fault, since women's domestic attachments were believed to subvert civic values. Thomas Anburey, whose account of his American experiences appeared a year before *Helena* was published, exploits this association when he describes the conflict of loyalties faced by the American general, Richard Montgomery. Montgomery was a British army officer who fought at Louisburg, Ticonderoga and Crown Point during the Seven Years War, but after the war he resigned his commission, settled outside New York, and married an American. On the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he accepted a high ranking commission in the Continental Army, and was killed in the American assault on Quebec in 1775. Anburey provocatively subverts the general's status as an icon of American patriotism by asserting that he acted out of excessive affection for his wife rather than from motives of civic duty:

Being, from his marriage and long residence in the country, considered as a man fit to be trusted with a command, he was appointed Brigadier General by the Congress; this commission he wished to decline, feeling a compunction, as a native of Great Britain, and once in the King's service, to bear arms against his Sovereign. His wavering inclination was unfortunately subdued, by the over-persuasion of a fond wife, whom he loved most affectionately, and the importunate solicitation of his relations and friends.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anburey, *Travels*, I, 61.

David Ramsay, in contrast, provides a radically different and wholly unconflicted interpretation of Montgomery's motives, presenting his decision as proof of a civic virtue that is defined in unmistakably republican terms:

Being a sincere lover of liberty, he had engaged in the American cause from principle, and quitted the enjoyment of an easy fortune, and the highest domestic felicity, to take an active share in the fatigues and dangers of a war, instituted for the defence of the community of which he was an adopted member.<sup>12</sup>

Both commentators are united in expressing Montgomery's dilemma as a conflict between civic and domestic obligations. According to Anburey, private interest proves stronger than public duty, while for Ramsay the opposite is true.

The different interpretations ascribed to Montgomery's choice between the country of birth and the country of adoption highlight the fact that more was at stake in these conflicts than individual freedom. Personal decisions had a civic dimension, and local communities had a vested interest in the outcome. The struggle for the control of people and property is literalized in Helena's account of a rich American widow who has secretly contracted a marriage with a British army officer. The opposing claims of her family of birth and her family of choice embody the crisis of allegiance that is as central to the novel as it was to the historical events that the author

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<sup>12</sup> Ramsay, *History of the American Revolution*, I, 243.

purports to relate. Acting with a force and stealth that mimic the wider military confrontation, the widow's incensed relations surround her house at night, 'intending to convey her to some place of confinement' (I, 58). Mrs H— and her servant escape through the back door and make their way to a friend's house, where Mrs H— borrows horses:

She boldly ventured to travel to New York, — what an undertaking for two women alone, unprotected! they arrived however, at Perth-Amboy that evening, and tying a white handkerchief to a whip, held it up as a signal for the boat; they waited a length of time with impatience; — at last the welcome sight of the boat putting off, raised their dejected spirits. (I, 59)

When the fugitives finally reach New York, Mrs H— discovers that her husband has lost a leg in a recent engagement and that their future is likely to be one of financial distress. Although Helena rejoices in their reunion, her emphasis on the anxieties of the flight and the uncertainties of the future engenders a sense of loss rather than of triumph, and highlights the personal suffering that is the inevitable consequence of war.

The dilemmas inherent in such choices are manifest in their harrowing repercussions. Helena and Lucinda, like many other observers, profess shock and dismay at the severity with which large numbers of loyalists were treated during the conflict and *Helena* records several traumatic confrontations, highlighting the plight of the women and children

involved.<sup>13</sup> From New York, Helena sends Lucinda an account of the suffering inflicted on the family of a loyalist general living just outside the city. In an attempt to capture the general, a party of American soldiers surround the house; when their plans are thwarted by his absence they set fire to the building while his wife, daughter and grandson are still inside. The general's daughter fights her way through the flames and escapes into the woods, carrying her nephew in her arms. His wife, however, is wounded by the attackers, who taunt and ridicule her until she sinks unconscious to the ground:

Mrs D— uncertain of the fate of her daughter, ran into the midst of the soldiers, calling on her in the most affecting terms: ----- these barbarous wretches ridiculed her fears, and laughing told her, one of their officers had conveyed her to their boat; her agony was not to be expressed. (I, 65)

Luckily, a servant escapes to raise the alarm and Mrs D— is rescued by a detachment of Hessians posted nearby, although the house is almost entirely destroyed by the time they arrive. Miss D— and her nephew are not found until the following day, having spent the night lost in a swamp, in terror of pursuit.

From the other side of the military and ideological divide, Lucinda has her own experiences of wartime hardship to share with Helena. When

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<sup>13</sup> Anburey, *Travels*, I, 357-8. See also *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*, pp. 106-10; *The School for Fathers*, I, 214-6.

the British occupy Philadelphia in the autumn of 1777, she and her family are forced to flee. They return the following summer, after the British have evacuated the city, and Lucinda witnesses an event which she describes as having ‘almost frozen [her] with horror’ and which she is certain will ‘affect ... Helena’s gentle heart’ in a similar manner (I, 267-8). She describes how Mr C, the father of their school friend Agnes, has been detected in a secret correspondence with General Howe and seized by a party of American soldiers, who parade him through the city in a cart, exposing him to the insults of a mob who threaten to tear him to pieces. While this is happening, his house is razed to the ground and his wife and children thrown out on to the street.

When Mr C is finally carried away to prison to await sentence, his wife and children, the ‘unfortunate victims to popular fury’, are succoured by the Franklins. Mrs C’s sufferings are so acute that she loses her reason and dies without regaining her sanity, but Lucinda’s mother accompanies Agnes to visit her father in prison and, for the children’s sake, her father intercedes with Congress on Mr C’s behalf:

The representation my father made of the distressed family, excited their commiseration, and they at length remembered they were men.  
(I, 282)

The reluctance of the state to exercise compassion is at odds with the spontaneous sympathy and strenuous assistance offered by the Franklins,

which is communicated with sentimental fervour to Helena and, through her, to all the readers of the novel. The suffering of Agnes and her family prompts Lucinda to offer one of the few overtly political comments in the novel:

Oh! Helena, what a trial of my sensibility, — what a wretched family, good God! — Humanity shudders at the retrospection. Consider (oh! you authors of those calamities, by causing this disunion with the mother country) what must be your condemnation at that tribunal, from which there is no appeal. Every day fresh instances arise, pregnant with accumulated horrors of the effects of (as it has proved) your erroneous proceedings. (I, 272)

This accusation sits uncomfortably with Lucinda's character as the daughter of a congressman who is completely devoted to the American cause. It is, however, entirely consonant with the anxious political climate of 1790 and an Anglo-centric concern, not merely with the past excesses of the American War of Independence, but with the present threat of revolutionary instability in France and possibly even at home.

In reporting the American War through the eyes of its eponymous heroine and her friends, *Helena* focuses attention on the ways in which the women of both sides experienced the conflict.<sup>14</sup> Reflecting a conventionally

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<sup>14</sup> For accounts of women's experiences of the war see, amongst others, Burgoyne, *State of the Expedition*, pp. 127-9; Brown, *Baroness von Riedesel and the American Revolution*; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Jennifer D. Thorp, *The Acland Journal: Lady Harriet and the American War* (Winchester: Hampshire County Council, 1993); Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the*



gendered distinction between public and private forms of discourse, Helena and Lucinda read and write the war as a narrative of separation and loss rather than as a contest between opposing ideologies.<sup>15</sup> Their letters contain nothing of the rhetoric of liberty but much about the fate of families, friends and property, and Helena finds the bleakness of the conflict most poignantly represented in the deserted homesteads and broken fences that she encounters throughout her journey, as the war effaces structures of colonization and ownership:

Oh! my dearest Lucinda, wherever we turned our eyes, what desolation appeared: — the country was one universal common, — all the inclosures torn down, not the least vestiage of cultivation to be seen, the miserable inhabitants fled from their hitherto peaceful dwellings, abandoning them and their little properties, for a place of safety. (I, 42-3)

She is particularly moved by the deserted and rain swept settlement of Perth-Amboy, where she and her companions wait for the exchange of prisoners to be completed, and many of the novel's subscribers may have shared her shock at the desolation she encountered, since several companies of the 47<sup>th</sup> Foot had been quartered there in 1773 and 1774:<sup>16</sup>

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*American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Ray Raphael, *The American Revolution: A People's History* (London: Profile, 2002), pp. 107-143.

<sup>15</sup> On the gendering of political argument see Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*; Ruth H. Bloch, 'The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America', *Signs*, 13 (1987), 37-58; Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, The Family and Political Argument in England 1680-1714* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup>H. C. Wylly, *The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment*, 2 vols (London: The Royal United Service Institution, 1933), II, 40-1.

Here we hoisted a flag for the English army, across the river, on Slater's [Staten?] Island, to send boats for us; — they did in the course of half an hour: in the interim, wet as it was, we rambled about the town; would you believe it, my Lucinda, the houses were entirely deserted, — not a human being to be seen, — most of the doors torn down; — in short, nothing but ruins to be perceived. (I, 46)

As recorded by Helena and Lucinda, the course of the war is marked less by victory or defeat on the field of battle than by the tally of homes destroyed or abandoned and the stories of women, children and prisoners shuttling backwards and forwards as the tide of war ebbs and flows around them.

Through the narration and transmission of such stories, the letters that pass between Helena and Lucinda bear witness to the ways in which female friendship and community of interest transcend national and political divisions. Their correspondence is further enlarged by an epistolary decorum that delegates the description of particularly emotional events in the heroine's life to her female friends. A strong sense of sisterhood develops as a community of women whose lives are disordered by the war share their experiences and offer mutual sympathy and support. As Lucinda records her response to the stories that Helena relates, empathizing not only with her friend but also with the unfortunate wives and daughters whose sufferings are described, she guides other sensitive readers to bridge the political and patriotic divide and join in deploring the consequences of war. This transatlantic network of sympathetic women embodies a liberal and mutually beneficial ideal of empire that is widely removed from the

patriarchal and authoritarian institutions which the colonists felt compelled to reject.

### *The Regency Crisis in Ireland*

The American colonies were not the only part of the empire seeking to redefine their relationship with Britain in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Many of those who bought the novel may have found parallels with their own contemporary political situation inscribed within *Helena's* narratives of conflicting allegiance. The 1770s and 1780s were years of significant constitutional agitation in Ireland and in their efforts to achieve legislative independence the 'patriot' party in the Dublin Parliament advanced many of the arguments deployed by the American 'rebels', deploying what Maurice Bric has called 'a common political language and sensibility'.<sup>17</sup> Although Irish aspirations initially met with determined resistance from Westminster, the situation changed substantially as a result of the American War, particularly when France and Spain joined the conflict and rendered Britain vulnerable to invasion. Throughout 1778 and 1779 Lord North's ministry came under increasing pressure to yield to Irish political demands in order to ensure that Ireland remained loyal and

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<sup>17</sup> Maurice J. Bric, 'Ireland, America and the Reassessment of a Special Relationship, 1760-1783', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 11 (1996), 88-119 (p. 88).

defensible. Tensions were increased by the rapid growth of the Volunteer Movement. Raised and controlled by local gentry, these militia regiments sought ostensibly to protect Ireland against the threat of foreign invasion, but they also demanded political and economic reforms. In 1779, North conceded a 'Free Trade' agreement, and further concessions followed the change of ministry in 1782, including the repeal of the Declaratory Act of 1720 which empowered the British Parliament to legislate for Ireland. In Robert Bage's 1784 novel, *Barham Downs*, one of the protagonists exults in these developments, noting that Ireland 'is going to recover her lost rights; America restores them to her'.<sup>18</sup> However, parliamentary independence was not everything. The Irish executive remained firmly under British control, the offices of Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary were in the gift of the Crown, and supporters of the administration, such as Dominick Trant, insisted that 'the Government of Ireland must necessarily follow the Administration of the Crown of England, as a Satelite [sic] follows its primary Planet, as every accessory follows its principal'.<sup>19</sup>

In the months immediately preceding *Helena*'s publication, questions of allegiance were once again at the forefront of national debate and a closer perusal of the novel's subscription list suggests that contemporary political concerns may be significant in contextualizing the

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Bage, *Barham Downs*, 2 vols, reprinted in facsimile (New York: Garland, 1979), II, 290.

<sup>19</sup> Dominick Trant, *Observations on the Late Proceedings in the Parliament of Ireland on the Question of a Regency for that Kingdom* (Dublin: W. Sleator, 1789), p. 26.

tropes of paternal absence and family disturbance that characterize many of its narratives. When George III first began to exhibit signs of insanity in the autumn of 1788, the ensuing constitutional crisis took on a singular dimension in Ireland, where the nature and legality of British rule were still fiercely contested. In February 1789, the Irish parliament voted by 128 votes to 74 to reject an administration motion insisting that it was incumbent on the Irish legislature to wait for the English parliament to appoint a regent and define his powers.<sup>20</sup> While Pitt and Fox were still wrangling over the issue at Westminster, both houses of the Irish parliament defied their executive and invited the Prince of Wales to assume the Regency of Ireland. The Viceroy, Lord Buckingham, refused to transmit their Address, but the parliament appointed a Commission to travel to England and present it to the Prince of Wales in person. To their frustration, the Commission's departure was delayed by contrary winds, and, by the time they reached London, the king was known to be recovering and a regency was no longer required.<sup>21</sup> *Helena's* subscription list reveals that many of the novel's most eminent subscribers were closely associated with the Dublin administration. Purchasers include Robert Hobart, the Chief Secretary, and the Countess of Westmoreland, wife of the newly appointed Lord Lieutenant. Six of the

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<sup>20</sup> W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 5 vols (London: Longmans, 1892), II, 472.

<sup>21</sup> *The History and Proceedings of the Lords and Commons of Great Britain, in Parliament, with Regard to the Regency ... Containing the Speeches of the Lords and Commons of Ireland, on Appointing the Prince of Wales Regent without Restrictions* (London: John Stockdale, 1789).

aristocratic patrons (the Marchioness of Antrim, Lady Carleton, Countess Carhampton, the Countess of Glandore, Viscountess Clonmel and the Marchioness of Waterford) were married to men who had staunchly supported the executive during the crisis. All had dissented from the Address to the Prince of Wales and four had been promoted in the peerage as a reward for their support.<sup>22</sup>

The uncertainties concerning severity, duration, and prognosis that characterized the king's illness are reflected in the constitutional debates concerning the limitation of the regent's powers that dominated parliamentary business at Westminster in the winter of 1788-9.<sup>23</sup> Opposition friends of the Prince of Wales insisted that a regent should be able to exercise all the powers of the monarchy, including the right to create hereditary peers, whilst the King's supporters favoured a restricted regency, arguing that essential bulwarks of the state, including the hereditary peerage, should remain unchanged, in anticipation of the monarch's eventual recovery.<sup>24</sup> Against this background of national uncertainty, the desire for stability and restoration reflected in Helena's anxiety for the fate of her missing father, and reinforced by the novel's many other narratives of family disturbance, acquires additional resonance. Helena's private fears parallel the public anxieties of 1788-9, when the political nations of Britain

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<sup>22</sup> G.E.C., *The Complete Peerage*, ed. by Vicary Gibb (London: St Catherine Press, 1910).

<sup>23</sup> Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad Business* (London: Lane, 1969).

<sup>24</sup> See Trant, *Observations on the Late Proceedings*.

and Ireland strove to assimilate and accommodate the absence of their royal father. Paternal absence (real or potential, temporary or permanent) is a recurring theme in the novel, and its exploration against the background of an emergent American nation hastening to reject the paternal authority of George III reinforces the public resonance of its private histories. In 1776, as in 1789, fatherlessness was inescapably a national as well as a personal dilemma. As Linda Colley has shown, in the wake of the defeat in America loyalist commentators increasingly sought to represent the king as a national father figure whose ‘undoubted domestic probity and obstinate patriotism ... seemed to many to represent a reassuring stability in the midst of national flux and humiliation’.<sup>25</sup> A similar idealized and familial construction of the monarchy distinguishes the royal family’s brief appearance in *Helena*, at a theatrical performance that Helena and her party attend soon after their return to London. The openness of the king’s countenance, the handsome appearance of the princesses and the gracious condescension of the queen signify an affective connection between ruler and people to which Helena is highly responsive:

The queen particularly engaged my reverence; her majesty has a most amiable countenance indeed; benevolence and sensibility is blended in her expressive features, accompanied with a condescension that charms every beholder. (I, 150-1)

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Colley, ‘The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820’, *Past and Present*, 102 (1984), 94-129, p. 104.

As Gillian Russell has noted, the importance of Georgian theatre as ‘a site for the expression of monarchical authority’ was enhanced by George III’s frequent visits to Covent Garden and Drury Lane, particularly at times of national crisis.<sup>26</sup>

### *Military Masculinity – An Extended Account*

The idealized construction of military merit that is found in *Caroline*, and which will be seen again in *Julia*, also features prominently in *Helena*. Throughout the novel, officers of both armies are portrayed as unfailingly courageous, courteous and uncomplaining, equally at home in the drawing room and on the battlefield. During their journey to New York, Helena and her fellow prisoners are visited by a group of American officers, and Helena expresses her admiration of their commanding officer, Colonel Webster:

I was struck with the colonel’s figure on his entering the room, — a majestic deportment, — a commanding eye, — spoke the soldier and the gentleman ... He enquired particularly the treatment we had experienced during the time we had been prisoners; — the gentlemen mentioned it as it deserved.

I am happy to hear said he, that gentlemen made prisoners through the fate of war, and as such defenceless, have nothing to complain of from us.

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<sup>26</sup> Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 17.



We fight for our liberties, we war not with these, who, in the prosecution of their duty, become subject to our power; these, continued he smiling, are my real sentiments, and I hope of most of my country-men. (I, 41-2)

The colonel's regal bearing and 'commanding eye' identify him as a figure of authority, whilst his concern for the prisoners' welfare reflects the sentimental and idealistic belief that military service, polite manners, social responsibility and disinterested benevolence were mutually compatible. The noble sentiments that Colonel Webster expresses were not always translated into action, of course, and the American War saw quite as much mistreatment of prisoners and civilians on both sides as any other conflict.<sup>27</sup> As it happens, several of the subscribers to *Helena* could have testified to the truth (or otherwise) of the heroine's praise for the chivalry of her captors. The 47<sup>th</sup> Foot had served with Burgoyne during the Canadian expedition of 1777, and Lieutenant Colonel Irving, Major Alcock and Captain Marr had been amongst those taken prisoner following the surrender at Saratoga.<sup>28</sup> Their promised return to England was delayed by the refusal of Congress to ratify the Convention agreed between Burgoyne and Gates, and, as a result, they had spent more than three years as prisoners of war.

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<sup>27</sup> Colley, *Captives*, p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> *Orderly Book of Lieutenant-General John Burgoyne, From his Entry into the State of New York until his Surrender at Saratoga*, ed. by E. B. O'Callaghan (Albany: J Munsell, 1860), pp. 177-9.

The conditions of their imprisonment left much to be desired, particularly during the first harsh winter in Massachusetts, when, according to the account published by Sergeant Roger Lamb:

It was not infrequent for thirty, or forty persons, men, women and children, to be indiscriminately crowded together in one small, miserable, open hut; their provisions and fire-wood on short allowance; and a scanty portion of straw their bed, their own blankets their only covering. In the night time, those that could lie down, and the many who sat up from the cold, were obliged frequently to rise and shake from them the snow which the wind drifted in at the openings, or, in case of rain, to endure the “chill peltings of the merciless storm”.<sup>29</sup>

In the novel, Helena herself is forced to spend one night in similarly wretched circumstances during the British prisoners’ removal to Reading:

Figure to yourself, a miserable hut, composed of logs, thrown against each other, not sufficiently close to keep out the inclemency of the weather; suppose us huddled together (guards and all) in this dismal habitation, seated on the ground, the gentlemen furnishing us with their greatcoats, eating our supper, a repast not unentertaining, from the uncommon novelty, of the situation. (I, 27-8)

When they reached Reading, however, she and her companions were housed in relative comfort at the inn, which, although ‘a very indifferent place’ by English standards, now appeared ‘a palace’ in comparison to their earlier accommodation (I, 29).

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<sup>29</sup> Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal*, p. 196.

On her arrival in Staten Island Helena is equally impressed by the loyalist officers of the Queen's Rangers with whom she and her party lodge on the night following their exchange. She accords her warmest praise and admiration to their commander, Colonel Allen, who receives the newly released prisoners 'with the utmost politeness', apologizing for the 'homeliness of the entertainment' that he can offer them, and the fact that his guests will have to take their tea from 'tin pints' (I, 47-8). The Queen's Rangers were a loyalist regiment of some renown and Scott's account of them is a blend of fact and fiction. Colonel Allen is a fictional creation, but the regiment *was* stationed on Staten Island in the early months of 1777 and was later famously commanded by Major John Simcoe, under whom it became a byword for courage, discipline and efficiency.<sup>30</sup>

Helena's brief but vivid description of the colonel and his officers highlights their disinterested patriotism, physical endurance and cheerful camaraderie:

Colonel Allen gave us up his bed, the only one there was; he seldom makes use of it, but sleeps, like the rest of the officers, on the ground, wrapped up in their blankets.

And yet, in defiance of all these hardships, they had amazing spirits, — nick-naming each other and contriving a hundred ways to amuse themselves. Finer men I never beheld, — tall and elegantly proportioned, most of them all possessed of properties in America; but chusing to embrace our side, lost it.

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<sup>30</sup> C. J. Ingles, *The Queen's Rangers in the Revolutionary War* (Montreal: Industrial Shops for the Deaf, 1956).

We could hear them in the night, coming in and throwing themselves down to rest, — cold and wet, no doubt: — no one, (my amiable friend,) can tell but those that have experienced it, the distresses of a military life. (I, 48-9)

In Scott's insistence on gentility and rank as defining characteristics of the military elite, it is perhaps admissible to discern another anxious glance at the revolution taking place in France, where far-reaching changes to the structure of the army were already causing considerable concern.<sup>31</sup> In *Helena*, not only are officers of both armies portrayed as brave and gentlemanly, but their heroism, magnanimity, cheerfulness and courtesy are all representative of their social status. Acts of oppression and destruction are invariably the responsibility of irregular groups of unnamed 'soldiers', 'Americans', or even 'the enraged multitude'. In thus opposing chivalric values to the fury of the mob, *Helena* echoes Burke's socially and culturally conservative response to the French Revolution, also published in 1790.

Perhaps the most intriguing of all the military officers depicted in the novel is Helena's bashful admirer, 'the dear little sentimental colonel' (I, 76). Colonel Egerton is not a career soldier; he purchased his commission at the outbreak of the war and 'acquired immortal honour' in the battle of Bunker Hill (I, 80). He is well bred, well educated, patriotic and brave. However, he is also small in stature and effeminate in appearance, and his shyness makes him an object of ridicule to Helena's boisterous friend, Miss

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<sup>31</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 178-88. This topic is discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine.

D—. Helena, on the other hand, is grateful for his many kindnesses and favourably contrasts his considerate and retiring manners with the bold advances of more importunate suitors. When he finally proposes marriage, his confusion is both sentimental and comic, a sign of extreme emotion as well as extreme bashfulness, and although he expects to be refused his anguish at being rejected is acute. He comforts himself with the thought that he must soon return to America to rejoin his comrades and ‘together ... tread those paths of glory, now the only consolation left’ (I, 219).

Like the changing representations of George III described by Colley, *Helena*’s characterization of the military officer as a desirable compendium of social, domestic and civic virtues contributes to a wider programme of patriotic recuperation that accompanied the British defeat in the American War. Many of these acts of reparation and consolation sought to salvage national pride through the glamorous and poignant combination of martial heroism and sentimental affect that characterizes commemorative works such as Copley’s epic painting of *The Death of Major Peirson* and the imposing monument to Major John André, designed by Robert Adam and paid for by George III, that was erected in Westminster Abbey. In these very public representations, powerful feelings of national loss are confronted and transformed, but *Helena*’s private, female-authored narratives remain open and ambivalent. Correspondences between domestic and civic constructions of fatherhood, made resonant both by the novel’s

revolutionary setting and by contemporary political anxieties, reverberate in a dyad of acceptance and denial. Within the novel, paternal loss is both realized and deferred, and the threat of family dismemberment is alternately acknowledged and avoided. The insecurity and hardship that characterize the fatherless state are depicted and acknowledged but may not, after all, be realized. For although Helena's father is irretrievably lost (when the Courtenays finally reach London they discover that he has been dead for over two years) Lucinda's father hovers on the edge of death and is then restored to health through the care and ministrations of his wife and daughter (I, 50-1). Whilst the legal wrangles following Captain Courtenay's death expose his wife and daughter to penury and danger, Mr Franklin's providential recovery presages a return to domestic stability that parallels the return to political stability signalled by the king's restoration to health. *Helena's* conventional happy ending, which sees the novel's two heroines safely established with their chosen husbands on either side of the Atlantic and continuing their friendship through the medium of letters, holds out the promise of a future transatlantic alliance, but the strong sense of loss and regret created by the novel's representation of the war in America suggests that it may be some time before it will come to fruition.



## Chapter 8: Disruptive Passions

### *Julia, A Novel. Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces (1790)*

The interpolated tale of the American Revolution that concludes the first volume of Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* is a formal device that reiterates and illuminates key elements of the main narrative. It reinscribes the drama of divided loyalties that is at the heart of the novel, drawing parallels between the effects of uncontrolled passion in the domestic sphere and the disruption of the polity that manifests itself in war. It also rewrites masculine constructions of honour and military merit to reflect the principles of a feminized culture of sensibility that is promoted as the primary source of social and political cohesion. Towards the end of the second volume, the melancholy resonance of the American narrative is countered by a visionary poem prophesying the fall of the Bastille and associating the overthrow of political tyranny with the restoration of domestic happiness. In both instances, the interpolated texts draw on specific historical events to reflect and amplify the private suffering of the fictional protagonists and to suggest the wider political significance of their ordeal.



### *Embodying Disruption*

Williams is best known to modern readers as the author of *Letters Written in France*, a sympathetic eye-witness account of the French Revolution which is widely admired as a radical and feminist contribution to the revolution debate of the 1790s.<sup>1</sup> During the 1780s she achieved considerable fame as a poet, but *Julia* is her only novel, and her first publication in prose. The work has attracted the attention of a number of feminist commentators and an annotated facsimile has recently been published as part of the Chawton House series of women's novels.<sup>2</sup> However, in almost all cases the American narrative has been overlooked and its significance remains largely unexplored.<sup>3</sup>

The novel's title identifies *Julia* as one of many reworkings of the love triangle at the centre of Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and extends an invitation to read Williams's novel in the context of its predecessors.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Williams was not the first writer to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1992); Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, pp. 136-59; Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, pp. 30-79; Mary Favret, 'Spectatrice as Spectacle: Helen Maria Williams At Home in the Revolution', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32 (1993), 273-95; Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, pp. 48-80.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Julia*, ed. by Natasha Duquette (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009). Feminist critiques of *Julia* can be found in Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, pp. 73-84; Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 46-8; Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>3</sup> The novel's engagement with the American War of Independence is noted by Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, pp. 81-2 and Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>4</sup> The best known of these is Henry Mackenzie, *Julia de Roubigné*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell; Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1777). For a persuasive account of the influence of Rousseau's novel on British fiction of the Romantic period, see Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*.

use the American War of Independence as the backdrop for a revisionary account of Rousseau's controversial novel. Published three years earlier, Elizabeth Keir's *The History of Miss Greville* (1787) tells the story of another Julia, whose lover, Rivers, is posted to America in the early stages of the war.<sup>5</sup> Convinced of his death, Julia eventually marries a new suitor but faces a conflict of loyalties when Rivers returns to England. The three central protagonists steer a resolutely virtuous course through the ensuing difficulties, which are finally resolved when Rivers returns to America and dies on the battlefield, confident that he and Julia will one day meet again in a place 'where love will be no crime'.<sup>6</sup>

There is no external evidence that Keir's novel was known to Williams, but there are a number of similarities between the two texts. Williams's novel charts the progress and describes the consequences of Frederick Seymour's unlicensed passion for his wife's cousin, Julia. Although she is attracted by Frederick's personal and intellectual charms, Julia's conduct, like that of her namesake in Keir's novel, remains irreproachable throughout, a fact that Mary Wollstonecraft identified as the novel's greatest weakness when she reviewed it for the *Analytical Review*:

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Keir, *The History of Miss Greville*, 3 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1787).

<sup>6</sup> Keir, *The History of Miss Greville*, III, 185.

Julia's principles are so fixed that nothing can tempt her to act wrong [sic]; and as she appears like a rock, against which the waves vainly beat, no anxiety will be felt for her safety.<sup>7</sup>

However, whilst it may be unsatisfactory in terms of narrative suspense, Julia's steadfast determination is central to the novel's purpose, which is to show that passion *can* be subdued by reason, if it is not wantonly indulged. In the introductory *Advertisement*, Williams states that her intention in the novel is:

to trace the danger arising from the uncontrouled indulgence of strong affections; not in those instances where they lead to the guilty excesses of passion in a corrupted mind — but, when disapproved by reason, and uncircumscribed by prudence, they involve even the virtuous in calamity.<sup>8</sup>

Avoiding Frederick whenever possible, Julia retains control over her feelings, and 'if her heart was not quite at peace, its exquisite sensibility was corrected by the influence of reason' (I, 129). Her survival is predicated on an unremitting struggle to subdue the feelings that her reason condemns. Frederick, in contrast, continues to indulge his passion for Julia until 'the sensations which impelled him ... were too powerful to be combated by any effort of his reason' (I, 137). The price of his failure is death, but, like Rivers, he obtains consolation from the reflection that, thereafter, his love for Julia 'will be no crime' (II, 231).

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<sup>7</sup> *Analytical Review*, 7 (1790), 97-9 (p. 98).

<sup>8</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Julia, a Novel. Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1790), I, p. iii. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

As Watson points out, although *Julia* may at first sight appear to be ‘hermetically sealed within the sentimental tradition’, its engagement with the Rousseauistic plot of unlicensed passion carries a political charge.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Williams records Frederick’s calamitous failure to discipline his feelings for Julia in language that makes its political resonance explicit:

The region of passion is a land of despotism, where reason exercises but a mock jurisdiction; and is continually forced to submit to an arbitrary tyrant, who, rejecting her fixed and temperate laws, is guided only by the dangerous impulse of his own violent and uncontrollable wishes. (II, 18)

Undisciplined sexual desire is portrayed as a form of tyranny and, when Frederick’s transgressive passion rages out of control, the resulting chaos manifests itself in psychic and social disturbances that mirror the violent disruptions of war. Under the curious and prurient gaze of a fashionable society that Williams satirizes as shallow, mercenary and corrupt, the three central protagonists strive, with varying degrees of success, to restrain painful feelings of desire, jealousy and guilt. The potentially transgressive triangle is finally resolved when Julia and Charlotte draw on their deep mutual affection to re-establish reciprocal trust and confidence, and Frederick’s [un]timely demise from fever, only days after Charlotte gives birth to their son, allows the two women to form a united household and share in the upbringing of the child.

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<sup>9</sup> Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, p. 34.

The historical interventions forge a link between the self-contained world of the novel and the wider world of public affairs. However, Flynn's assertion that they are a sign of *Julia*'s 'ambitions towards historical novel status' is unconvincing.<sup>10</sup> Their status within, but separate from, the central narrative, together with their brevity, suggests that their significance is primarily illustrative and metaphorical. They do, however, provide strong support for Williams's sentimental conviction that private and public virtue are closely allied. The evidence of *Julia* suggests that, despite later differences in their responses to the French Revolution, Williams shared Burke's belief that 'we begin our publick affections in our families'.<sup>11</sup> Linked together by their parallel deployment of common sentimental tropes, the historical interpolations and the central narrative in *Julia* assert the interdependence of political and domestic values. Social harmony and personal happiness are shown to depend on the preservation of affective ties which are vulnerable to attack from despotic politics as well as disruptive passions. The American tale and the Bastille poem are strategically situated within the text to reinforce those connections.

The American narrative is placed at a significant turning point in the main story, marking the beginning of a downward trajectory in the relationship between the three central protagonists. The letters that make up the narrative are communicated privately to Julia, who reads them while

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<sup>10</sup> Flynn, *Americans in British Literature*, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 167.

Frederick and Charlotte are absent on their honeymoon. Their elegiac tone echoes Julia's growing sense of unease, and the tragic denouement of the story they relate hints at the destructive potential that has been unleashed by Frederick's decision to proceed with his marriage to Charlotte, even though he knows himself to be in love with her cousin. The novel's account of the devastating impact of the American War on individuals, family and community foreshadows the personal, familial and social disruption that will follow Frederick's inability to discipline the force of transgressive desire.

The letters carry news of the death of a British infantry officer, Captain F—, and an account of his relationship with Sophia Herbert, a young American woman to whom he has recently become engaged. The captain first encounters Sophia during the British attack on Norfolk, Virginia, on New Year's Day, 1776, in which Sophia's younger brother, Charles, is killed, and her home destroyed. After rescuing Sophia from the encroaching flames, Captain F— helps to reunite her with her father and subsequently becomes a regular visitor to the cottage in which they take refuge. The captain is impressed by the devoted manner in which Sophia nurses her father through an attack of fever, and she responds with gratitude to his many acts of kindness and consideration. Their engagement is sanctioned by Sophia's father, who approves their plan to get married at the end of the summer campaign. However, after Mr Herbert is killed in action,

Sophia's older brother angrily opposes her marriage to an enemy combatant. A few weeks later, Captain F— is killed in the British assault on Long Island. When she receives the news, Sophia loses her reason and collapses into delirium, regaining her sanity only as the moment of death draws near.

For eighteenth-century readers, the burning of Norfolk was a particularly resonant manifestation of the destructive violence of warring passions and was frequently cited by opposition commentators as proof that the American War had moved into a new and ignominious phase. In his parliamentary speech on the use of Indian warriors on 6 February 1778, Edmund Burke had cited the British attack on the Virginian port as an example of unacceptable military action, further proof that the administration were abandoning a 'war of conquest, which had been found impracticable', and replacing it with an even more shameful 'war of distress and intimidation'. Burke argued that such 'ravages of the King's troops' were incompatible with the standards of warfare appropriate to a civilized nation, and he denounced their ruthless tactics as fiercely as he condemned the atrocities committed by Britain's Indian allies.<sup>12</sup> Viewed against this background, Williams's depiction of the impact of the battle on civilian life and property resonates with political, as well as sentimental, significance. As Sophia approaches the town, where the 'clash of arms' is mixed with 'the tumultuous cries of women', she finds herself trapped:

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<sup>12</sup> *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. by Paul Langford, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981-2000), III (1996), 355-6, 359.

She had, however, gone too far to retreat, and was mingled with a crowd of helpless women and children, who were flying in desperation, they knew not whither; some hastening from the scene of desolation, others returning with distracted countenances, to save an aged parent or a helpless infant from the fury of the flames. (I, 247-8)

The arbitrary and unregulated violence of a war that obliterates an entire community is the ultimate embodiment of the despotism of uncontrolled passion, and the chaos that follows in the wake of the British attack not only prefigures the disruption that results from Frederick's unrestrained indulgence of his passion for Julia, but also underscores the drama of divided loyalties that is central to both narratives.

### *Sensibility and the Representation of Military Masculinity*

Ian Haywood's recent account of the discourse of 'spectacular violence' in the Romantic period provides a salutary reminder of the unrestrained ferocity that characterized late eighteenth-century warfare in general, and the American War of Independence in particular.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary commentators were deeply troubled by such reports, and it is perhaps not surprising that many fictional representations of the conflict seek to obliterate the unpleasant realities of war by engaging in a discourse of

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<sup>13</sup> Ian Haywood, *Bloody Romanticism: Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation 1776-1832* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), esp. pp. 150-70.



chivalry and sentiment. The American episode in *Julia* presents a highly feminized construction of military merit in which the conventional masculine discourse of martial heroism is tempered by the culture of sensibility that is promoted at greater length in the central narrative.

The letter announcing Captain F—’s death is written by a friend and brother officer who commends the captain’s thirst for military glory and his tender sensibility in equal measure. He records the courage and gaiety with which the captain marches into battle and his insistent refusal to abandon his men until the action is over, even though he has been severely wounded. Captain F—’s bravery, and his paternal care of the soldiers under his command, move all around him to tears:

After we had driven the enemy from the intrenchments, he was borne to a hut by four grenadiers. “Albeit unused to the melting mood,” their cheeks were bathed in tears. As they passed one soldier who lay wounded on the ground, the poor fellow, seeing his officer, raised his languid head, and said, “God Almighty recover, and bless your honour!” My friend insisted on their stopping: he took the soldier by the hand, saying, “I thank you, my brave lad; be of good cheer, I’ll send your friends for you directly.” The soldier repeated, “God Almighty bless you!” and expired. (I, 242-3)

In this brief account, Williams offers an idealized representation of the British infantry company as a cohesive family unit, in which men of all ranks share a culture of mutual affection and concern that is expressed through recognizably sentimental effusions of piety and tears. The officers

are bound to each other by ties of fraternity and comradeship, which find expression in shared confidences as well as shared dangers, and which are recognized in the keepsakes which Captain F— bequeaths to his brother officers ‘as remembrances of a departed comrade and friend’ (I, 243).

In promoting this sentimental ideal of military virtue, the American episode develops a theme that has already been introduced in the main narrative, where Julia’s virtues are linked to a military heritage that is characterized by sensibility and benevolence as much as by martial prowess. Both her father and her grandfather have been soldiers, though neither has profited from their military career and her father left the army when he was unable to purchase promotion. Julia has listened to her grandfather’s stories and imbibed their values from an early age, observing how ‘his language became animated, his martial enthusiasm revived, and all the misfortunes of his past life were absorbed in the gratifying recollection of having served his king and country’ (I, 61). Like Sterne’s Uncle Toby, the old man delights in reliving the battles in which he has taken part but is most admired for his ‘infinite benevolence and sweetness of disposition’ (I, 61). This is not the stern civic humanist model of the warrior-citizen but a new sentimental paradigm in which manly sensibility is added to courage, patriotism and the thirst for glory as a touchstone of military merit.

The sentimental construction of military merit is not unique to fictional representations of the American War. General Burgoyne’s



### *The Burial of General Fraser*

description of the burial of General Simon Fraser is one of many contemporary accounts that record instances of the sympathetic expression of feeling amongst military comrades:

The incessant cannonade during the solemnity; the steady attitude and unaltered voice with which the chaplain officiated ... the mute but expressive mixture of sensibility upon every countenance: these objects will remain to the last of life upon the minds of every man who was present.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition*, p. 126.

War remained an unspeakably brutal experience but the sentimental focus of such narratives obscures that reality. In the aftermath of a disastrous defeat they provide a degree of consolation and a suggestion that the slaughter may not have been in vain. By focusing on the soldier's tender human sympathies, rather than his belligerent actions, they assuage civilian anxieties and offer a more palatable account of the military activity of the state.

### *Sensibility and the Construction of Empire*

The culture of sensibility in *Julia* derives its main affective impetus from the reciprocal tenderness of fathers and daughters. The relationships between Captain Clifford and Julia, Mr Clifford and Charlotte, and Mr Herbert and Sophia are characterized by reciprocity of concern. Filial piety is generated and nurtured by paternal exertions to satisfy daughterly desire, and the sentimental accord between fathers and daughters leaves no room for the rhetoric of parental tyranny and filial insubordination that features in many accounts of the war. Whilst *Julia*'s engagement with the American War does not include any overt analysis of the politics of empire, the parallels between interpolated tale and central narrative reinforce the ideal of a social order characterized by cooperation and connectedness rather than

by competition and domination, and support a relationship between colonial periphery and metropolitan centre based on shared values and mutual interest rather than on subordination.

This represents a return to the earlier eighteenth-century concept of a British ‘empire of the seas’ dedicated to world-wide trade, carried on under the protective umbrella of British naval supremacy, supporting and supported by colonies of British citizens across the globe. As such, it is in stark contrast to the more authoritarian ideologies of empire that came to prominence in the aftermath of the Seven Years War and were largely responsible for the ensuing conflict between Britain and the North American colonies.<sup>15</sup> It is significant that Williams should embody the fracturing of the British empire in North America in the breakdown of conjugal and sibling affections rather than as a daughterly revolt against parental authority. Filial loyalties in *Julia* remain unchallenged. It is in the disruption of the conjugal affiliation of Frederick and Charlotte, the sibling relationship of Sophia and her brother, and the sisterly ties between Charlotte and Julia that Williams encodes the dangerous consequences of domestic and political disharmony.

In doing so, Williams continues the practice of writers such as Major John Cartwright, who use a variety of fraternal, conjugal and commercial

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<sup>15</sup> Changes in the nature of British imperial policy in North America are explored in some detail by Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*; Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* and Anderson, *Crucible of War*.

metaphors to advocate more liberal constructions of empire. Whilst never abandoning the idea of Britain as the ‘mother country’, nor losing hope that the king might act as symbolic father to a harmonious imperial family, Cartwright strongly advocates more egalitarian forms of imperial organisation. He rewrites the Anglo-American relationship as a sentimental courtship narrative, and advises Britain to refrain from forcibly ravaging the object of his desire, in a manner more suited to an ‘Eastern despot’ or ‘banditti ruffian’. In order to win the heart and hand of his American bride, Britain must learn to play the part of a ‘noble youth’:

He shall court her to his embrace with a manly and generous frankness; with sincere love, honour and respect; while she, wiping away the last falling tear ... shall, with angelic loveliness and heart-felt rapture, fly into his protecting arms; when instantly the sacred hymeneal rites and plighted vows shall seal between them an indissoluble union.<sup>16</sup>

Like the proposed union between Captain F— and Sophia Herbert, these hymeneal hopes were shattered by the brutal realities of an imperial war.

In her narrative poem, *Peru* (1784), Williams had already argued that imperial conquest is incompatible with the ideology of sensibility and the American narrative in *Julia* endorses that view.<sup>17</sup> However, the novel’s wider narrative shows how the ancestral Clifford estate, lost through the

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<sup>16</sup> John Cartwright, *A Letter to Edmund Burke, Esq; Controverting the Principles of American Government Laid Down in his Lately Published Speech on American Taxation Delivered in the House of Commons on the 19th of April 1774* (London: J. Wilkie, 1775), pp. 26-7.

<sup>17</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Peru, a Poem* (London: T. Cadell, 1784).

imprudence and extravagance of Julia's grandparents, is regained and refurbished with the wealth that Charlotte's father brings home from the East Indies. As we have already seen, Williams was by no means the only novelist to promote and defend a liberal construction of empire. The recovery of the Clifford estate, and the values associated with its restoration, are reminiscent of Mr Foston's acquisition of Henneth Castle in Bage's *Mount Henneth*. Seeking a site for his utopian venture, Bage's returning nabob chooses the Henneth estate in Cardiganshire, where 'the family seat is a large old castle, in good, though gloomy repair; and well-furnished in the seventeenth-century fashion'.<sup>18</sup> Valuing the past as a foundation for the future, Foston willingly accepts the requirement to purchase the furniture along with the property, unlike other prospective buyers, to whom the stipulation acts as a deterrent. Occupying an equally remote position, and thus equally free from the contaminating influence of metropolitan life, the ancestral home of the Cliffords retains similar signs of an ancient heritage, which Charlotte's father is also eager to preserve:

Mr Clifford had too much pride in his family to remove any marks of its ancient magnificence. He left, therefore, the tapestry, the massy chairs, and the family pictures, undisturbed, as useless but proud monuments of antiquity, in the background of his apartments, while he took care to bring forward all the comforts and conveniences of modern luxury. (I, 78)

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<sup>18</sup> Bage, *Mount Henneth*, I, 63.

The fact that both these ancient houses are purchased and restored through the application of imported wealth underwrites the benign possibilities of imperial enterprise.<sup>19</sup> Williams suggests that, provided it is acquired without oppression and exploitation, a fortune amassed through imperial trade can be carried home ‘without one subject of self-reproach to embitter the enjoyment of it’ (I, 73).

### *Sensibility and Social Organization*

In their deployment of the trope of the ancient building as a metaphor for the nation, both Bage and Williams anticipate Burke’s comparison of the pre-revolutionary French constitution to ‘a noble and venerable castle’ more in need of repair than demolition.<sup>20</sup> Charlotte Smith gives a more radical political charge to the same metaphor in *The Old Manor House* but Williams, like Burke, uses the analogy primarily to focus on the sentimental values of a virtuous past and to recommend them as the basis for social and political organisation.<sup>21</sup> In *Julia*, the restored family estate presents the vision of an ideal world, in which social and familial structures are shaped by mutual ties of sensibility rather than by hierarchies of authority and the

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<sup>19</sup> For a recent account of the anxieties associated with British imperial expansion at this time see Tillman W. Nechtman, ‘A Jewel in the Crown? Indian Wealth in Domestic Britain in the Late Eighteenth Century’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 41 (2007), 71-86.

<sup>20</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *The Old Manor House* is discussed in Chapter Ten.



relationship between landlord and tenant is familial rather than contractual.

As he returns to his ancestral home, old Mr Clifford is greeted by his tenants:

The women brought their infants in their arms to receive his blessing, and the old men crawled to the side of the chaise as well as they could, and blessed God that they had lived to see their old master again ... amidst blessings and acclamations, this welcome retinue reached the family-seat. The tenants were feasted in the hall; the ale flowed liberally; nothing was heard but the voice of rejoicing. (I, 74)

Williams suggests that a shared culture of sensibility promotes social cohesion and instils a sense of continuity. When Mr Clifford dies, his coffin is accompanied by ‘a long procession of his tenants, who hung over his grave as if unwilling to leave it; while the old recounted to the young, all they remembered of his childhood and his youth’ (I, 84). The history shared and created through these spontaneous acts of commemoration is the cohesive force on which society depends.

In the American narrative, the cohesive power of sensibility is recognized on both sides of the political divide even as the exigencies of war threaten its destruction. The sympathetic ties that bind the English infantry company together are the same bonds that cement the relationship between the Herbert family and their devoted elderly retainer, Robert. A large part of the interpolated narrative is devoted to a representation of the simple affection and steadfast fidelity with which Robert serves the family

that he has been attached to all his life, and the loving care they offer him in return. Unable to find Mr Herbert or Sophia in the aftermath of the British attack, Robert searches for Charles's body, struggles to move it out of the path of the fire, lies down beside it until the burial parties arrive, and marks the position of the grave. As he recounts these events, he remembers Charles's kindness to him and laments the destructive impact of public violence on domestic tranquillity:

He has often made me lay hold of his arm, and led me to my wicker seat at the end of the garden. Sit down, Robert, he would say, and bask a little in the sun, it will do you good: but its all over now ... they have destroyed everything — the shrubbery is all cut down, and torn to pieces, except a branch here and there, that is blown by the wind; it would have broke your heart to see it. (I, 254)

Robert's nostalgic lament for a pre-war existence that is presented as idyllic and unspoiled echoes the sentiments of James Parker, a loyalist merchant who lived in Norfolk, and whose home was destroyed during the attack on which Williams's fictive account is based:

I viewed the wreck of our little Eden the other day; Palmera is not more compleat in ruin, the Brick walls greatly battered with the Canon shot and ... the flowering thorn hedge, the few trees I collected with such particular care destroyed, and the clover walks all rooted up ...<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Caroline V. Zimmer, 'Margaret Ellegood Parker: A Loyalist Merchant's Wife', in *Virginia in the American Revolution*, ed. by Richard A. Rutyna and Peter C. Stewart, 2 vols (Norfolk, VA: Old Dominion University, 1983), II, 60-79 (p. 72).

In both these accounts the cutting down of trees and the uprooting of hedgerows are not merely acts of wanton violence; they also represent the destruction of a way of life and a pattern of human relationships that can never be restored.

Williams is not doing anything particularly new here. The capacity for fellow feeling is the *sine qua non* of sentimental ideology and such episodes are commonplace in sentimental literature.<sup>23</sup> However, the use of historical material enlarges the scope of the sentimental novel. By interweaving fictionalized accounts of historical events into her central narrative, Williams highlights the public and political significance of her sentimental ideology. The extended family circles that she describes function as microcosms of social and political harmony, vulnerable to the disruptive forces of war and passion, but capable of restoration by the overthrow of tyranny and the rational disciplining of transgressive desire. Links between the two narratives are underscored by a number of recurring images. Robert's wicker seat, which looks out onto a stream at the end of the Herbert's garden in Virginia, recalls the seat under the willow tree where Julia's grandfather gazes on the river Thames (I, 63-4). The episode of delirium in which Sophia imagines that Captain F— has been assassinated by her brother prefigures the delirious ramblings in which Frederick imagines himself forsaken by Julia and unforgiven by Charlotte. Most

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<sup>23</sup> See John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

striking of all are the deathbed scenes in which sentimental keepsakes are given or, in some cases, returned, to friends and loved ones.<sup>24</sup> In England, Captain Clifford distributes commemorative tokens to his daughter, brother and niece, whilst Captain F— bequeaths keepsakes to his brother officers in America. Captain F— also asks that the picture of Sophia that he wears round his neck be returned to her, with an assurance that only death had parted him from it, and there is a strange echo of this moment at the end of the novel, when the dying Frederick finally returns to Julia the glove and verses that he has secretly acquired and treasured, begging that she will forgive him and think of him after his death without resentment.

*Julia* continues the longstanding imaginative engagement with the events of the American War that had inspired Williams's poems *An Ode on the Peace* (1783) and *An American Tale* (1786).<sup>25</sup> In *Julia*, as in the poems, the evils of war are presented through their impact on domestic life and individual sensibilities rather than through political or philosophical discourse. Through its representation of scenes of domestic distress, the interpolated American narrative replicates the horrors of civil conflict for readers whose sympathetic response enables them to share the experience of suffering and bereavement. It also offers edifying paradigms of sensibility,

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<sup>24</sup> For an account of the significance of sentimental keepsakes in the eighteenth-century novel, see Deirdre Lynch, 'Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12:2-3 (2000), 345-68.

<sup>25</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *An Ode on the Peace* (London: T. Cadell, 1783); *Poems*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Cadell, 1786), I, 3-13.

devotion and patriotism as a basis for national renewal. Through a complex and significant intertwining of private and public narratives that has hitherto escaped scholarly recognition, *Julia* provides an early indication of the way in which accounts of the American conflict will acquire new resonance in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

## Chapter 9: Responding to Burke

### *Desmond* (1792)

*Desmond* is an overtly political novel that combines sentimental fiction with polemical argument and intervenes directly in the revolution debate of the 1790s. Charlotte Smith's radical politics and her opposition to Burke have been widely discussed in recent years, but the way in which her representations of the American War of Independence are deployed in support of her reformist agenda is less well documented.<sup>1</sup> *Desmond's* account of the American War is undeniably brief, but it is a key element in Smith's optimistic portrayal of the process of social and political change in revolutionary France.

*Desmond* is set against the background of events in France between June 1790 (when hereditary titles were abolished) and February 1792 (when the permanent establishment of a constitutional monarchy still seemed a real possibility). It was published in June 1792, four months after the events that

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<sup>1</sup> For accounts of Smith's politics and her dialogue with Burke see Lorraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 129-206; Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, pp. 160-84; Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 103-21; Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, pp. 130-42.

it purports to relate and three months before the storming of the Tuileries and the abolition of the monarchy signalled that the revolution had entered a new and more violent phase. Its explicit engagement with contemporary politics was unusual in a romantic novel, particularly one written by a woman, and Smith expected critics to ‘exclaim against the propriety of making a book of entertainment the vehicle of political discussion’.<sup>2</sup> In an outspoken preface, she vigorously defends her decision to mix public and private discourse, attacking the idea that women have no interest in, or understanding of politics and asserting their right both to speak and to be heard on issues of public importance:

But women it is said have no business with politics. – Why not? – Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged! – Even in the commonest course of female education, they are expected to acquire some knowledge of history; and yet, if they are to have no opinion of what *is* passing, it avails little that they should be informed of what *has passed*, in a world where they are subject to such mental degradation; where they are censured as affecting masculine knowledge if they happen to have any understanding; or despised as insignificant triflers if they have none. (3)

Smith’s self-conscious determination to foreground the novel’s political agenda is reflected in her decision to reject the original title, ‘The Wandering Lover’, on the grounds that it might provoke expectations of a

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<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Desmond* (1792), ed. by Stuart Curran (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), p. 4. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

romantic tale ‘calculated only for mere novel readers’, rather than a work of ‘strength and thought’.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary reviewers endorsed her aims and applauded the skill with which they were executed. In the *Analytical Review*, Mary Wollstonecraft quoted Smith’s preface in full, praising her inclusion of ‘the French Revolution, and the present state of France’ and warmly commending a novel in which ‘the cause of freedom is defended with warmth’.<sup>4</sup> The *European Magazine* considered that the novel ‘vindicated the cause of French liberty with much acuteness’, and applauded Smith as a writer whose work ‘towers above the common productions of the day’.<sup>5</sup> In the *Monthly Review*, William Enfield somewhat patronizingly attributed recent improvements in the female character to the ‘higher and more masculine tone’ of the novels that women were reading, and welcomed the fact that works of fiction were becoming ‘vehicles of useful instruction’. He therefore approved the way in which Smith had ‘ventured beyond the beaten track, so far as to interweave with her narrative many political discussions’, and supported her view that women had civic as well as domestic responsibilities.<sup>6</sup> Even the *Critical Review*, which did not share Smith’s radical views and found her representation partial in many respects,

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Garnai, ‘A Letter from Charlotte Smith to the Publisher George Robinson’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 19:4 (2007), 391-400, (p. 399).

<sup>4</sup> *Analytical Review*, 13 (1792), 428-35 (p. 428).

<sup>5</sup> *European Magazine*, 22 (1792), 21-3 (p. 22).

<sup>6</sup> *Monthly Review*, n.s. 9 (1792), 406-13 (p. 406).



admitted the sincerity of her arguments, conceding that ‘the opportunities of modern fine ladies for information are so few, that every means of their obtaining it, incidentally, should be approved of’.<sup>7</sup>

The novel’s fictional account of the American War of Independence underpins Smith’s forthright response to the work that her hero describes as the ‘elaborate treatise in favour of despotism ... lately published by Mr Burke’ (127). Burke’s vehement and unexpected opposition to the French Revolution was profoundly shocking to those who recalled his powerful arguments in defence of the rights and privileges of American colonial assemblies during the parliamentary debates of the 1770s, and Desmond’s reaction is symptomatic of the widespread anger and dismay aroused in radical circles by a treatise in which Burke ‘advances opinions, and maintains principles absolutely opposite to all the professions of his political life’ (286).<sup>8</sup> By linking the American and French Revolutions and stressing their common opposition to tyranny, Smith challenges both the logic and the integrity of Burke’s case. Through the testimony of Montfleuri, who served with the French army in America as a young man, she marshals opposition to ‘the many absurdities into which a resolution to defend a pernicious system, betrays its ablest advocates’ (59).

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<sup>7</sup> *Critical Review*, n.s. 6 (1792), 99-105 (p. 100).

<sup>8</sup> For examples of Burke’s radical response to the American War see, *Speech of Edmund Burke Esq. On American Taxation, April 19, 1774*, 2nd edn (London: J. Dodsley, 1775); *Speech of Edmund Burke Esq., On Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, March 22, 1775* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775).

### *The Epistolary Form*

*Desmond*, alone among Smith's novels, is cast in the epistolary format common both to eighteenth-century sentimental fiction and to polemical treatises such as *Reflections*. A year after the storming of the Bastille, Lionel Desmond travels to France to distract himself from the misery of his passionate attachment to a married woman. Arriving in Paris just in time to witness the grand spectacle of the *Fête de la Fédération*, he is befriended by an enlightened aristocrat, the *ci-devant* Marquis de Montfleuri, meets various members of his family, listens to their views, visits their estates, and records both private and public concerns in his correspondence with his friend and erstwhile guardian, Erasmus Bethel. As Antje Blank and Janet Todd point out in their introduction to the 1997 edition of *Desmond*, the epistolary discourse between Bethel and Desmond 'mimics and parodies the structural concept that underlay [*Reflections*]'.<sup>9</sup> Burke's famous response to the French Revolution is cast in the form of a private letter addressed to a young French nobleman, to whom he appears in the guise of mentor. Erasmus Bethel, who shares Burke's initials, and who, like Burke, remains in England during the revolution and does not witness it for himself, assumes a similar role in relation to Desmond. The most significant difference between the two accounts is that *Desmond* not only records both sides of the conversation between mentor and protégé, but also allows the

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<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, ed. by Antje Blank and Janet Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997), xi-xxxix, (p. xxv).

radical young enthusiast to prevail over his more conservative correspondent.

The strength of Desmond's case rests partly on the rational nature of his arguments – in pointed contrast to Burke's sentimental and high-flown rhetoric – but mostly on the fact that he speaks from his own direct experience. The fictive authority of personal observation that characterizes Desmond's depiction of the current state of France and Montfleuri's account of the American War of Independence is emphatically opposed to the second-hand, and therefore unreliable, nature of Burke's histrionic narrative. It is known that Smith spent several weeks in France during the late summer of 1791, just before she began to write the novel, and the self-confident tone of Desmond's letters from France reflects the assurance of authorial experience.<sup>10</sup> In his first letter from Paris, Desmond pointedly contrasts the factual accuracy of his own descriptions with the sentimental exaggeration of less trustworthy accounts:

I can now, however, assure you – and with the most heart-felt satisfaction, that nothing is more unlike the real state of this country, than the accounts which have been given of it in England; and that the sanguinary and ferocious democracy, the scenes of anarchy and confusion, which we have had so pathetically described and lamented, have no existence but in the malignant fabrications of those who have been paid for their mis-representations. (43)

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<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline M. Labbe, 'Gentility in Distress: A New Letter by Charlotte Smith (1749-1806)', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 35 (2004), 91-3.

Within the time frame of the novel, this letter, dated 19 July 1790, precedes Desmond's reading of *Reflections* by several months, but its scathing accusations are clearly directed at Burke and designed to question the veracity of his account.<sup>11</sup>

The questions of authority and authenticity that form the basis of Smith's combative response to Burke's notorious polemic are highlighted by her use of the multi-vocal epistolary form. The work of Watson and Favret has drawn attention both to the subversive potential of the 'private letter circulated among ... sentimental protagonists' and to the political significance of the open letter, 'symbol of representative government and evidence of a tolerant, equitable system of justice – and of communication', in the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Despite her professed doubts about 'succeeding so well in letters as in narrative' (3), Smith skilfully exploits the contrasting capacities of the medium, combining the subversive intimacy of the private letter of the sentimental novel with the candid exposition of the public letter of political debate in order to promote her radical agenda. At the same time, however, her attack on Burke highlights the unreliability of the subjective voice to which the epistolary medium gives expression. The novel's political argument and its courtship narrative

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<sup>11</sup> Direct quotation of the most [in]famous passages from *Reflections* occurs only after Desmond receives the book. A parody of Burke's lament over the unchivalrous treatment of Marie Antoinette appears in the letter dated 8 January 1791, in which Desmond acknowledges receipt of his copy (p. 128). Desmond's reference to Burke's use of the term 'swinish multitude' appears in the letter dated 10 April 1791 (p. 145).

<sup>12</sup> Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, p. 39; Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, p. 10.

both demonstrate that letters are not always the sincere and unmediated expression of sentimental subjectivity: they also act as a conduit for the dissemination of duplicitous, partial or misinformed opinion.

### *The American Precedent*

Smith's representation of the American War is an essential part of her response to Burke and *Desmond's* optimistic vision of a reformed French polity freed from the abuses of power associated with the *ancien régime* openly challenges Burke's gloomier prognosis. This confidence is underpinned by the record of American achievement in the years since 1775, which Montfleuri has witnessed for himself. His visits to America during and after the war allow him to reflect both on the violence of the revolutionary period and the stability and prosperity of the post-war years. In the young American republic, the years following the Treaty of Paris had been devoted to the construction of new political institutions. The federal constitution devised by the Constitutional Convention of 1787 finally came into effect in June 1788, after it had been ratified by nine of the member states. In April 1789, George Washington was elected as the first President of the United States of America and later that year the process of drafting the first ten amendments to the constitution (known as the Bill of Rights)

began. On 29 May 1790, ten days before Desmond begins his journey to Paris, Rhode Island finally ratified the constitution, the last of the states to do so. It is against the background of successful constitutional change in America, rather than the later violence of the French Revolution, that the political argument of *Desmond* should be understood.

The comparison between France and America begins with a reminder that the French are by no means the only nation in modern times to have sought an escape from tyranny: the American colonists were equally impatient of injustice and determined to secure reforms. As one of the French soldiers who fought in America, Montfleuri is particularly well placed to draw parallels between the rebellious colonies and revolutionary France and to remind Desmond that *ancien régime* autocracy was not confined to France:

I saw, amidst the almost undisciplined Americans, many instances of that enthusiastic courage which animates men who contend for all that is dear to them, against the iron hand of injustice; and, I saw these exertions made too often vain, against the disciplined mercenaries of despotism; who, in learning to call them rebels, seemed too often to have forgotten that they were men. (59).

His account draws on conventional civic humanist ideology to portray the colonists, like the revolutionaries, as virtuous citizen-soldiers opposing the professional armies of an authoritarian state. It resonates with the conventional tropes of despotism and injustice that adorned the speeches of

those, such as Burke, who had sympathised with the American cause, and furnishes a subtle reminder of his apostasy. The success of the American Revolution in overturning an autocratic regime and replacing it with stable and more equitable institutions is offered as proof that the same can happen in France, directly contradicting Burke's pessimistic assessment.

The French, Smith suggests, are engaged in the same struggle for liberty that animated the colonists, an argument that Montfleuri endorses when he identifies the American Revolution as the key catalyst for change in France. He points out that Louis XVI's cynical and opportunistic support for the colonial cause had exposed French subjects, 'who had no choice, but went to be shot at for the liberties of America, without having any liberty of their own' (59), to a seductive new discourse and example of freedom:

Blinded by that restless desire of conquest, and their jealousy of the English, which has ever marked its politics, our government did not reflect that they were thus tacitly encouraging a spirit subversive of all their views; nor foresee, that the men who were sent out to assist in the preservation of American freedom, would soon learn that they were degraded by being themselves slaves; and would return to their native country to feel and to assert their right to be themselves free.  
(59)

This argument was also advanced from the opposite end of the political spectrum on occasion. In his anti-Jacobin novel, *The Democrat* (1795), James Henry Pye attributes the revolutionary sympathies of certain sections of the French aristocracy to their military service in America, where they

learned to consider themselves ‘as champions of universal liberty’.<sup>13</sup>

Modern historians have largely supported this analysis, although they have also acknowledged the substantial impact of the financial burden incurred by the French in the course of their endeavours. As Simon Schama succinctly observes, ‘the consequences of French involvement in the [American] revolutionary war were ... profoundly subversive and irreversible’.<sup>14</sup> More surprising, perhaps, as Schama points out, is the extent to which this was foreseen by contemporary French commentators, many of whom were quick to identify the American Revolution as a ‘beacon of virtue and happiness and a model to emulate in France’.<sup>15</sup>

Desmond Wryly notes that this unintended consequence of the Franco-American alliance affords considerable satisfaction to the British, who had bitterly resented French intrusion in their domestic dispute with the colonies and who regard the present turbulence in France as just retribution for Louis XVI’s interference in British affairs. His comment provokes Montfleuri to ridicule the inconsistency of British commentators, such as Burke, who had condemned French intervention in America but who now oppose the National Assembly’s moves to curb such unprovoked aggression:

These good countrymen of your’s are a little inconsiderate and inconsistent; inconsiderate in not reflecting, that the interference

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<sup>13</sup> James Henry Pye, *The Democrat*, 2 vols (London: William Lane, 1795), I, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Schama, *Citizens*, p. 36.



which seems so unpardonable, was the act of the cabinet, not of the people ... and, inconsistent, inasmuch, as they now exclaim against the resolution we have made to deprive our monarchs of the power of making war; a power which they thus complain has been so unwarrantably exerted. (59)

Recently introduced into the French constitution, the measure to limit the royal prerogative to declare war had been comprehensively denounced by Burke, who was adamant that this ‘most dangerous of all prerogatives’ ought not to be entrusted to the legislature, but should remain under the sole control of ‘the executive magistrate’.<sup>16</sup> Montfleuri’s reminder that French intervention in the American War, condemned by the British and undertaken against the interests and without the consent of the French people, had been sanctioned by the very prerogative that Burke now sought so stridently to defend, effectively exposes the absurdity and inconsistency of his position.

Smith’s emphasis on the savagery of the American War is also directed at Burke. Montfleuri’s description of the ‘ferocity’ of an internecine civil war in which the English and Americans became ‘butchers of each other’ (59) is intended to highlight the relatively peaceful progress of the revolution in France (still a tenable position as the novel was being written) and counters the melodramatic violence of Burke’s account of the removal of the royal family from Versailles. A further riposte is implicit in

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<sup>16</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 173.

Montfleuri's account of the post-war stability and prosperity of the new American republic under a more representative and participatory system of government. Burke had not disguised his extreme scepticism about the composition of the new French legislature, questioning the integrity, experience and impartiality of the representatives drawn from the bourgeoisie. The full force of his eloquence had been directed against the members of the *Tiers Etat* and the excessive power they enjoyed as a result of their numerical equality with the two other estates. As well as castigating the provincial advocates whom he described as the 'fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation', he had poured scorn on the 'country clowns ... some of whom are said not to be able to read and write', and the traders who 'had never known anything beyond their counting-house'.<sup>17</sup> The crux of the matter, as far as Burke was concerned, was that these groups did not represent 'the natural landed interest of the country', and were therefore likely to be motivated by private interest rather than concern for the public good. A constitution that privileged ability over property in this way would, he argued, inevitably prove unstable.<sup>18</sup>

Montfleuri's account of his recent visit to America, where he found that 'a country which seemed to be devoted to destruction' (59) was now 'in the most flourishing state of political health' (60) furnishes evidence to refute this charge:

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<sup>17</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>18</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 38-45.

Nothing is more false than that idea of the veteran statesman, that a country, under a new form of government, is destitute of those who have ability to direct it. – That they may be unlearned in the detestable chicane of politics, is certain; but, they are also uncorrupted by the odious and pernicious maxims of the unfeeling tools of despotism. Honest ministers then, and able negociators will arise with the occasion. – They have appeared in America; they are rising in France – they have, indeed, arisen. (60)

For later readers, Smith's optimism about the future direction of the French Revolution would resonate with irony, but in the early months of 1792 Montfleuri's account of colonial and post-colonial American experience provides a convincing rationale for the necessity and feasibility of replacing the corrupt and despotic institutions of the French *ancien régime* with more accountable forms of constitutional government.

## Chapter 10: A Veiled Critique

### *The Old Manor House* (1793)

The moment of revolutionary optimism that *Desmond* captures so vividly was destined to be short-lived. As Smith began to write her next novel, the French Revolution was already spiralling into the violence that Burke had predicted and in the climate of anxiety following the September massacres of 1792 the confidence of British radicals began to wane. Smith was financially dependent on her writing, and could not afford to lose public support, but her revulsion at the increasing violence of the Revolution did not diminish her attachment to its ideals. Completed early in January 1793, only days before the execution of Louis XVI, *The Old Manor House* adopts a narrative strategy that distances the novel from contemporary politics and engages with Burke in a more oblique, though equally determined, way. Instead of confronting Burke's critique of the state of France, *The Old Manor House* challenges his celebration of the English constitution. Overt reflections on the French Revolution are restricted to the margins of the novel, but a more extensive representation of the American War of Independence forms part of a wide-ranging satire on British social and

political institutions that invites comparison with, and provides implicit commentary on, political developments in France, while simultaneously maintaining a prudent distance from them. The dialogue with *Reflections*, which was a significant animating force in *Desmond*, is resumed. Not only does the novel's courtship plot interrogate issues of ownership, inheritance and authority through a gothic representation of the English feudal estate that significantly problematizes the Burkean metaphor of the 'noble and venerable castle', but its representation of the American War offers a subversive commentary on the health of the British polity.<sup>1</sup> Smith's account of the conflict exposes the corruption of a political system in which a war can be prosecuted 'in absolute contradiction to the wishes of the people who were taxed to support it', a criticism that reflects radical concerns about the condition of England in the 1790s as well as the 1770s.<sup>2</sup> The spirit of exile and alienation that pervades the novel's American episodes embodies the experience of many liberal thinkers in a society that was increasingly at odds with their enlightened values.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith's use of the Burkean castle metaphor has been widely discussed; see, in particular, Lorraine Fletcher, 'Charlotte Smith's Emblematic Castles', *Critical Survey*, 4 (1992), 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Ina Ferris (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), p. 309. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

*The Consent of the People*

The hero's choice of profession and his imminent departure for the colonies are the starting point for an exploration of British attitudes to the American War. Orlando Somerive, an impecunious second son with great expectations but no present financial resources, joins the army when his father's friend, General Tracey, offers to procure a commission for him. Unlike characters in a comparable situation in earlier novels – Henry Hammond in *Emma Corbett*, John Amington in *The Fair Syrian*, Harry Courtney in *Caroline* – Orlando's participation in the war owes nothing to patriotic enthusiasm. By the mid-1790s, novelists are less prone to intervene in the debate about 'patriot' politics than their predecessors; their protagonists find themselves in America for other, more personal, reasons. Orlando's engagement with the military activities of the state is largely involuntary. Assured by General Tracey that the rebellious American colonists are already on the brink of defeat, he has no expectation of being called to active service and is both surprised and dismayed when, in May 1777, his company is ordered to Portsmouth to prepare for immediate embarkation. The transatlantic crossing provides Orlando with an early initiation into the rigours and uncertainties of war and signals the turbulent and troubling nature of the conflict. The long, hazardous voyage is a transitional and metamorphic event that functions both literally and metaphorically as a rite of passage from domestic to military life, emphasizing Orlando's increasing alienation

from the home and family that are the notional objects of his protection. The hesitation and misgivings that attended the action in America are embodied in the high seas and raging storms that no longer guarantee Britain's insular integrity but serve instead to frustrate imperial military endeavour and threaten British lives. Many who embark on the perilous journey fail to reach their destination, as Orlando becomes painfully aware when he seeks to discover the fate of his sister, Isabella, and observes the destruction of the ship in which he believes her to be a passenger.

Smith uses the American War to expose the corruption of the British polity, both to justify her own reformist agenda and to challenge Burke's resistance to change. In a satirical attack on those responsible for the conduct of the campaign, she reveals how hardships endemic to the crowded and unsanitary conditions on board the troop ships are aggravated by illness. The sickness is caused by the tainted provisions supplied by greedy contractors and its consequences are exacerbated when the soldiers' plight is ignored by careless, inhumane and incompetent officers whose positions have been purchased with money and influence. By shaping her American material to support a critique of British social and political institutions, Smith highlights affinities between Georgian Britain and *ancien régime* France. She argues that in both nations court patronage has disturbed the vital balance between the three estates and that this imbalance must be corrected if the polity is to regain its virtue. Moreover, she insists that it

would be hypocritical for any citizen of a state that had recently conducted a vicious civil war against its own colonial subjects to criticize the comparatively limited violence of the revolution in France. Both arguments are designed to undermine Burke's credibility and to discredit his reactionary response to the French Revolution.

Within the novel, British ignorance of the issues underpinning the quarrel with the colonies is a matter of concern, with profound implications for the nature and validity of political consent. Nevertheless, Orlando's growing belief that the American War was prosecuted against the wishes of the British people is problematized by tensions and ambiguities in the narrative. For although research on public opinion and the activities of the London debating societies confirms that contemporary opposition to the American War was both more extensive and more vocal than has often been allowed, this disapproval is not apparent in the novel.<sup>3</sup> Many of the characters show little awareness or understanding of the issues, and whilst their biased or apathetic acquiescence raises a significant question about the nature of consent, it is rather different from the one posed by Orlando:

He [Orlando] had always been told, that the will of the people was the great resort in the British Government; and that no public measure of magnitude and importance could be decided upon, but by the agreement of the Three Estates. Yet the present war, carried on against a part of their own body, and in direct contradiction of the right

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<sup>3</sup> See Bradley, 'The British Public and the American Revolution'; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*; Andrew, *London Debating Societies*.



universally claimed, was not only pursued at a ruinous expence, but in absolute contradiction to the wishes of the people who were taxed to support it. Orlando did not comprehend how this could be ... (308-9)

Orlando offers no evidence to substantiate an assertion that runs counter to his own experience. Most of his acquaintances appear to support the administration's policy of coercion and the range of views canvassed in the novel suggests that in the early years of the conflict, when prospects of a British victory seemed plausible to many, the landed, commercial and military elite of Britain were largely, if unthinkingly, in favour of the war.

However, in reporting the opinions of a wide variety of characters Smith also signals that their biased, self-interested, superficial or apathetic acquiescence can hardly be construed as informed consent. General Tracy's confident conviction that 'those wretched, ragged fellows, without discipline, money, clothes, or arms, will be unable longer to struggle for their chimerical liberty' is both ill-informed and prejudiced, based on the partial and self-aggrandizing accounts of his military friends (118). Basking in the conviviality of his dining room, Orlando's wine-merchant uncle, Mr Woodford, displays a vulgar commercial insensibility, toasting 'Confusion to the Yankies' and expressing the ghoulish wish that 'there may soon be not a drop of American blood in their rebellious hearts' (254). His support for the military initiative, despite his contempt for a profession that offers so little in the way of profit to compensate for the degree of risk it entails, is motivated by a financial self-interest incompatible with civic virtue or

objective opinion. An equally unthinking nationalistic bellicosity prevails amongst the social elite enjoying the hospitality of the *nouveau riche* Mr Stockton, who ‘all agreed in one sentiment — that the rebellious colonists ought to be extirpated’ (127). More concerned with family pride than contemporary politics, Orlando’s elderly cousin, Mrs Rayland, supports the war in order to perpetuate antiquated notions of allegiance and authority. Inordinately vain of her cavalier ancestry, she considers the Americans as ‘descendants of the Regicides, against whom her ancestors drew their swords’ (118) and as ‘rebels and roundheads, to conquer [whom] seemed to her to be not only a national cause, but one in which her family were particularly bound to engage’ (284). Her response links the imperial autocracy of the 1770s with the monarchical absolutism of the Stuart era.

Whilst many characters in the novel bestow consent through partiality or self-interest, others acquiesce through apathy and ignorance. Orlando’s tender-hearted and liberal-minded mother is immersed in domestic life and takes only a passing interest in public affairs. Her support for the war is based on a mixture of prejudice and misinformation and is symptomatic of a lack of interest apparently shared by the majority of the population, including her son:

Having no time or inclination to investigate political matters, she now believed that the Americans were a set of rebellious exiles, who refused, on false pretences, ‘the tribute to Caesar’, which she had been taught by scriptural authority ought to be paid. Thus considering them,

she rejoiced in their defeat, and was insensible of their misery; though, had not the new profession of Orlando called forth her fears for him, she would probably never have thought upon the subject at all – a subject with which, at that time, men not in parliament and their families supposed they had nothing to do. (214)

It is not until he is supervising the embarkation of his men that Orlando begins to question the nature of the enterprise in which he is employed. On arrival in America, he is appalled by ‘the horrors and devastations’ of war (307) and speedily concludes that such scenes were ‘not to be justified by *any* cause’ (308). However, it is only a chance meeting and an unrecorded conversation with an American prisoner that give him a rudimentary insight into the politics of the conflict in which he is engaged. Unimpressed by the arguments of his fellow soldiers, Orlando’s doubts about the justice of the war ‘became greater the more he heard of its origins’ (308). This growing moral and political awareness signifies an increase in civic virtue on Orlando’s part and soon compels him to question the morality of a professionalized army acting as the servant of the fiscal military state. His friend, Lieutenant Fleming, feels no such qualms and insists that it is the business of soldiers to fight without asking questions:

A man who takes the King’s money is to do as he is bid, and never debate the matter. ... I am no politician, nor do I desire to enter into a discussion about taxation and representation, which these fellows have made the ground for their resistance. There is no end of the nonsense that may be talked in favour of their rebellion, nor the pleas of the ministerial party. For myself, as I was brought up in the army, I

have always cut the matter very short – the sword is my argument; and  
I have sold that to my King, and therefore must use it in his service,  
whatever and wherever it may be pointed out to me. (308)

Fleming is a career soldier and Orlando admires his concern for the welfare of his family and his dedication to the men under his command. However, although he respects Fleming's military experience he remains unconvinced by his arguments, and continues to feel uneasy about his own involvement in the campaign.

Whilst many earlier fictional accounts of the American War explore the political, moral and psychological impact of a civil war between members of the same national family, the representation of the war in *The Old Manor House* is primarily concerned to expose the autocratic nature of the British polity in the 1770s (and, by implication, in the 1790s too) and to use those insights to combat Burke's resistance to change. Smith's focus on the constitutional responsibilities of the 'three estates', and the accountability of the military forces at their command, is shaped in response to *Reflections*, which is largely preoccupied with similar issues. Particularly to be regretted in the new French constitution, Burke thought, was the fact that authority over the army would no longer be vested solely in the person of the monarch, but would be subject to the scrutiny and control of an elected legislature. The proposal that the French legislative assembly should confirm the appointments of military officers would, he insisted, undermine

‘the chain of military subordination ... on which the whole of that system depends’.<sup>4</sup>

Smith counters this argument on two fronts. She highlights shortcomings in the current court-administered system of military appointments through a conventional portrayal of unrewarded merit in the person of the conscientious and courageous Lieutenant Fleming. In addition, she uses Orlando’s naïve enquiries both to promote the idea that the state should enact, rather than repress, ‘the will of the people’, and to lament the failure of the British polity to achieve this end. Orlando’s troubled musings reflect Smith’s conviction that the subordination of the individual to the needs of the state requires the protection of fully informed constitutional consent. Fleming’s professional pragmatism, on the other hand, exemplifies the mechanical obedience that ensues when military service becomes a profession controlled by the state, rather than the patriotic response of concerned citizens. Both Smith and Burke express anxieties about a professionalized army but their fears take different forms. Whilst Burke warns that the erosion of executive authority will encourage the rise of a dangerous ‘military democracy’, Smith expresses traditional civic humanist suspicions of a standing army under the control of a powerful and corrupt executive.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear whether Fleming’s acceptance of the ‘King’s money’ symbolizes an offer of allegiance or seals a financial contract, and

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<sup>4</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 179.

this confusion reflects anxieties concerning the changing nature of the army in the modern world that remain unresolved. Weighing ‘the infatuation of the British Cabinet’ against ‘the easy acquiescence of the British People’, Orlando is uncertain where final responsibility lies (309). Excluded by ignorance and naivety from the understanding of the underlying chicanery of British politics that is conveyed to the reader by the authorial voice, he remains unaware of the fundamental threat to the constitution posed by the award of military contracts to Members of Parliament, whose votes to continue the war are motivated by a venal greed for personal profit that displaces consideration of the wider public interest. As a result of this corruption, the legislative prerogative to restrain executive abuse of military power by withholding supplies, the focus of Parliament’s opposition to Charles I and proximate cause of the English Civil War, has been fatally undermined.

### *Alienation and Exile*

The public events of the American War intrude into the romance plot of *The Old Manor House* with considerable abruptness. Disconnected from the courtship narrative, the American episode has a distinctly transitional quality, but its themes of exile, alienation and captivity are central to the

novel's vision of England. The severity of Orlando's dislocation from the domestic environment of Rayland Hall and West Wolverton is emphasized by a constant concern for his lover, Monimia, and an obsessive anxiety about the fate of his sister, Isabella. Katie Trumpener has suggested that this sense of estrangement 'relativizes the world view of the English aristocracy, even as it demonstrates their inability to grasp their place in and impact on the rest of the world, given their resolutely local and provincial perspective'.<sup>6</sup> Compelled to confront his own ignorance and prejudice, Orlando contrasts the pastoral happiness he had enjoyed in his native country with the misery he sees around him in war-torn America and begins to question assumptions that he has previously accepted without thought. Repressing the knowledge that wars most often arise 'from a mistaken point of honour, from the wickedness of governments, or the sanguinary ambition or revenge of monarchs', Orlando initially tries to convince himself that he will be fighting for his country's glory (300). Even as he seeks consolation in this idea, however, he perceives that it is based on erroneous readings of both English and classical history. Supplementing Orlando's hesitant interrogation of the politics of war with confident authorial assertion, Smith deconstructs the sentimental romance of Burke's great hymn to chivalry, looking behind glamorous constructions of personal valour and martial prowess to question the culture of honour and glory. Although Orlando

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<sup>6</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 169.

cannot yet see so far, the authorial voice reveals that, shorn of chivalric ideology, heroic rulers are no more than crowned murderers whose famed exploits are merely acts of personal vanity. Smith resists Burke's romantic attachment to 'pleasing illusions' and 'the decent drapery of life' by presenting the American War as sordid, unjust, corrupt, and badly managed.<sup>7</sup> Modern warfare, Orlando learns, is an exchange in which the destruction of one group of taxpayers is funded by another. Glory is not purchased metaphorically by exertion but is bought and sold for hard cash to line the pockets of profiteering contractors, many of them members of parliament.

The brutality, unpredictability and futility of war are literalized in Orlando's experiences with the American Indians recruited by Burgoyne. The controversy surrounding Burgoyne's Indian alliances has been discussed in some detail in Chapter Six, but the extent to which the issue continued to trouble the national imagination is evident in the frequency with which it reappears in fictional accounts throughout the 1780s and 1790s.<sup>8</sup> Angela Keane has suggested that Smith's conventionally stereotypical representation of American Indians in *The Old Manor House* marks a colonialist discourse that 'mediates the culpability of the British,

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<sup>7</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to the novels discussed in this thesis, see also Phebe Gibbes, *Elfrida; or, Paternal Ambition*, 3 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1786); Lemoine, *The Kentish Curate; The School for Fathers*; Edward Sayer, *Lindor and Adelaide, A Moral Tale. In which Are Exhibited the Effects of the Late French Revolution on the Peasantry of France* (London: John Stockdale, 1791); Harriet and Sophia Lee, *Canterbury Tales*.



making them complicit with brutality rather than its architects'.<sup>9</sup> However, Smith's footnotes at this point reveal an intention to magnify British brutality in America rather than to mitigate it. Her marginal note begins with a lengthy quotation from Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution*, summarizing the debate about the British deployment of Indian auxiliaries. She then refers readers to an account in the *Annual Register* of atrocities committed by loyalists and their Indian allies in the Wyoming area of Pennsylvania in the summer of 1778,<sup>10</sup> and challenges them to draw comparisons with recent events in France:

Those who have so loudly exclaimed against a whole nation struggling for its freedom, on account of the events of the past summer ... are entreated to recollect how much the exploits of this expedition ... exceed anything that happened on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, or at any one period of the execrated Revolution in France – and own, that there are savages of all countries – even of our own. (310, n.)

Anyone accepting the invitation to consult the *Annual Register* would have discovered that most of the horrifying acts of violence were reprisals carried out by American loyalists against their local communities, or even against members of their own families, not wanton acts of savagery committed by their 'cruel and barbarous' allies (310, n.). Smith's footnote opens up a marginal space in which she not only displaces the savagery of the Indian

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<sup>9</sup>Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup>*Annual Register*, 1779, pp. 8-14.

warriors onto the British who employed them, but also uses that displacement to relativize and contextualize the violence of August and September 1792 in France.<sup>11</sup>

Orlando is predictably disturbed and ashamed by his encounter with the Indian auxiliaries employed by the British and his response is conveyed through a repertoire of well-worn images that embody a conventional mixture of admiration and distaste:

Their savage appearance, and the more savage thirst of blood which they avowed – that base avidity for plunder, with an heroic contempt of danger, pain and death, made them altogether objects of abhorrence, mingled with something like veneration. (310)

Smith's tentative and ultimately unconvincing attempts to modify these negative perceptions are embodied in the contrast between the veteran Indian leader known as the Bloody Captain and a young warrior called Wolf-hunter. Her representation of Wolf-hunter draws on a European ideal of the noble savage mediated by a sentimental ideology which argues that a 'secret sympathy between generous minds seems to exist throughout the whole human kind' (311). Wolf-hunter possesses finer feelings and more gentle manners than his companions, and his sentimental credentials are displayed, not merely in his friendship for Orlando, but through his role in a

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<sup>11</sup> The racist implications of Smith's displacement of Indian 'savagery' on to their British allies are discussed by Janina Nordius, "'A Kind of Living Death': Gothicizing the Colonial Encounter in Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*", *English Studies*, 86 (2005), 40-50.

striking re-inscription of the story of Jane Macrea.<sup>12</sup> In Smith's recasting of the tale, a young American woman is driven into the forest by British troops who have burned her farm and killed her husband. There she is discovered by the Bloody Captain, who is on the point of killing her with his tomahawk when Wolf-hunter intervenes to save her, risking his own life in the process. Having rescued her from his kinsman, he then 'conducted [her] in safety to a fort garrisoned by her own countrymen – again hazarding his own life to preserve hers' (311). Not only does this episode reverse the story of Jane Macrea: its representation of a defenceless woman rescued from the cruel onslaught of barbarian rage and chivalrously escorted to a place of safety is also a subversive rewriting of Burke's overblown account of the assault on Marie Antoinette at Versailles.

Orlando's experience of the American War culminates in a captivity narrative that reinforces his increasing sense of dislocation and prefigures his return to a world made strange through absence. The sense of alienation that characterizes his captivity is an extension of the cultural unease that drove him to seek refuge in the library at Rayland Hall and finds its full expression in the complete estrangement that he experiences on his return. These circular thematics limit the extent to which the American episodes function as a rite of passage or *bildungsroman*, and Orlando returns to Rayland Hall physically unrecognizable but essentially unchanged by his

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<sup>12</sup> The story of Jane Macrea is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

extraordinary adventures. After his struggles to find Monimia and reunite his family, the narrative concludes when he finally gains possession of the hall and begins to make optimistic plans for its improvement. As depicted by Smith, the American War of Independence is a transitional event, for the American nation as well as for Orlando Somerive. It is a harsh but essential rite of passage that enables a break with the past but preserves the hope of a future built on sturdy English foundations.



## Chapter 11: Bringing The War Home

### *The Voluntary Exile (1795)*

Eliza Parsons' representation of the American War of Independence is the most comprehensive of all the fictional accounts that I have examined, but it is also one of the most pessimistic. When Parsons looks back on the events of the American War, she does so not in order to comment on the ideological conflict between Britain and America, nor to support (or resist) the need for contemporary political reforms in Britain or France, but to present a series of highly wrought sentimental images of the destructive impact of war on combatants and civilians alike. This change of emphasis reflects the intense anxiety over national security, and the mounting fears of a French invasion, that dominated British politics in the last five years of the eighteenth century. When *The Voluntary Exile* was published in the summer of 1795, Britain had been at war with revolutionary France for over three years. Initial hopes of a speedy victory had not been realized; with the exception of a brief period during the Peace of Amiens (1802-3), the conflict would last for twenty-three years, until the allied victory at Waterloo in 1815.

Eliza Parsons was born in 1739 and began her career as a novelist in order to provide for her family when she was left destitute by the death of her husband in 1790.<sup>1</sup> Over the next twenty years she produced nineteen works of fiction, two of which are amongst the ‘horrid’ novels listed by Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*.<sup>2</sup> However, the ‘uncommonly dreadful’ events that feature in *The Voluntary Exile* are not the imaginary terrors of gothic fiction which so delighted Catherine Morland, but the genuine horrors of the American War of Independence.<sup>3</sup> On a moral level, as her final chapter explains, protagonists and readers alike are exposed to ‘various scenes of misery and vexation’ in order to learn ‘proper discrimination’ and thus be ‘gradually led to happiness’.<sup>4</sup> In terms of contemporary politics, the novel’s uncompromising picture of the dreadful calamities endured by the inhabitants of ‘those countries that [are] the seat of war’ reinforces the anxieties provoked by the escalating conflict with revolutionary France (IV, 198).

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<sup>1</sup> Eliza Parsons, *The History of Miss Meredith*, 2 vols (London: T. Hookham, 1790), I, p. iii. See also the entries for Parsons in *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*, ed. by Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Batsford, 1990) and the *DNB*.

<sup>2</sup> Eliza Parsons, *The Castle of Wolfenbach: A German Story*, 2 vols (London: William Lane, 1793); *The Mysterious Warning: A German Tale*, 4 vols (London: William Lane, 1796).

<sup>3</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. by John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; rpt. 1998), p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Eliza Parsons, *The Voluntary Exile*, 5 vols (London: William Lane, 1795), v, 268. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

*Bringing the war home*

*The Voluntary Exile* appeared at a time of increasing political and military tension in Britain. Foreign affairs continued to be dominated by the war with France, in which British forces had met with very mixed fortune. Victories in the West Indies and Admiral Howe's defeat of the French fleet on the Glorious First of June had been offset by failures at Toulon and Hondschoote and the disintegration of the First Coalition. During the summer of 1794, the French had regained the border fortresses of Charleroi, Condé and Valenciennes and occupied the Austrian Netherlands. Early the following year, they captured the Dutch fleet as it lay imprisoned in the ice and impounded British ships in Dutch ports. As a result, the French navy were in a position to threaten British sea lanes and coastal defences. Fearing an imminent invasion, Pitt's administration was compelled to order the withdrawal of the British army from Europe and to postpone British efforts to assist the Royalist uprising in the Vendée.<sup>5</sup>

At home there were mounting fears that the French Revolution might yet be exported to Britain. The suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act and the Treason Trials of 1794 had ushered in a prolonged period of state repression, but a poor harvest and consequent high prices continued to fuel public anger and popular unrest. Not long after the novel was published, a

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed account of diplomatic and military policy during this period, see Jennifer Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution 1785-1795* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), pp. 205-36.



hostile mob jeered at the king as he drove in state to open the new session of parliament; on the return journey his coach was jostled by the crowds, and an assassination attempt was feared.<sup>6</sup> In such dangerous times the *Critical Review* confessed itself happy to have discovered a novel that it could recommend to the nation's young female readers 'as containing nothing very inimical to good morals or good taste'.<sup>7</sup> However, there was one aspect of the work that the reviewer considered a potential threat to national security:

This is not the age of chivalry — In the present times of political fermentation and public danger, our young women perhaps would do better to silence their hearts by strengthening their understandings, than foster their sensibility by indulging in enervating descriptions of tender sentiments.<sup>8</sup>

Despite *The Voluntary Exile*'s 'general good sense' and 'many humane and liberal reflections', the novel's conventional preoccupation with 'tender sentiments' and 'the subject of love' was seen as both self-indulgent and unpatriotic.<sup>9</sup>

*The Voluntary Exile* is a long, circuitous and episodic novel, sentimental in tone and didactic in intent, in which the hero's military and amatory adventures are the thread that connects a variety of disparate plots

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<sup>6</sup> Clive Emsley, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on British Politics and Society', in *The French Revolution and British Culture*, ed. by Ceri Crossley and Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 31-62; Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 66-80.

<sup>7</sup> *Critical Review*, n.s. 14 (1795), 352-3 (p. 352).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

and characters. Henry Biddulph is a young Englishman of property, orphaned at an early age and brought up under the supervision of a good-hearted but weak-willed uncle. Henry possesses a naturally good disposition and a cultivated sensibility but he falls into error through imprudence, inexperience, and an uncritical acceptance of the dictates of a morally suspect chivalric code of honour. Full of remorse following the death of his wife and child, for which he holds himself in large part responsible, Henry undertakes a period of 'voluntary exile' by enrolling as a volunteer with Lord Cornwallis, who is about to embark for America. His motives for engaging in the war are personal rather than patriotic but he performs with some distinction, winning acclaim for his actions during the unsuccessful assault on Charleston in June 1776 and the attack on New York later that summer. He is wounded during the advance through New Jersey and survives only through the charitable care of a family of Quakers who rescue him from the battlefield. Although Henry is horrified by the misery and carnage he witnesses, and admires the committed pacifism of his hosts, he feels that it would be dishonourable to resign his post and rejoins the army in time for the attack on Philadelphia. During the British occupation of the city he becomes acquainted with the Franklyn family, and immediately falls in love with the younger daughter, Harriot. He also grows progressively more disillusioned with the war and eventually resigns his commission. Although Harriot's tyrannical guardian and Henry's villainous cousin

conspire to obstruct their marriage, the couple are finally united and return to settle in England.

This brief synopsis cannot adequately capture the texture of a work that abounds in superfluous incident, melodramatic rhetoric, exaggerated pathos and undifferentiated characters, all of which pose significant problems for modern readers. However, it is not only modern sensibilities that struggle to maintain engagement: the novel's cautionary narratives were also deemed excessive by the *Critical Review*, which complained that 'horror is crowded upon horror till our sympathy becomes exhausted, and we read of faintings, death, and madness with perfect apathy'.<sup>10</sup> Despite the accuracy of this observation, it is arguable that the diagrammatic nature of the novel's narratives of wartime distress suits the author's purpose. Lacking the particularity and realism that we have come to expect from novelistic discourse, Parsons' admonitory anecdotes transcend historical specificity. In the anxious climate of the 1790s, her repetitive rehearsal of the calamities of an earlier war sounds a timely warning of present danger, an insistent but unspoken plea to protect British shores from the brutal realities of battle.

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<sup>10</sup> *Critical Review*, pp. 352-3.

*'Foreigners, savages, worse than the fiercest beasts'*

Although Britain was a nation in arms for much of the eighteenth century, very little of the fighting took place in the British Isles. When the author of *The School for Fathers* (1788) described the hardships suffered by an American family during the War of Independence, he reminded his British readers of their good fortune:

Ye contribute money to the war; but it is carried far away from you.  
— Ye can never become the seat of desolation, or be witness to the  
dreadful scenes that rive the heart in the bare relation.<sup>11</sup>

One of the ideological functions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century representations of war is to recreate and mediate the activity of warfare for a British public lacking immediate experience of its impact, and, as Mary Favret has pointed out, to filter and alter its content as they do so.<sup>12</sup> However, although members of the reading public lacked first hand knowledge of military conflict, they had ready access to vast quantities of information and commentary, and the stream of publications that issued from British presses well into the 1790s suggests that most readers were well acquainted with the military and political dimensions of the American War. Although twenty years had passed since the outbreak of the conflict, Parsons is so confident that readers of *The Voluntary Exile* will be familiar

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<sup>11</sup> *The School for Fathers*, I, 179.

<sup>12</sup> Favret, 'Coming Home: The Public Spaces of Romantic War', p. 539. For a more recent and extensive account of Favret's thesis, see Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

with the events of which she writes that she declines to give a detailed account of the military confrontation:

As there has been so many and exact details of the progress of our arms in America, it is unnecessary to enlarge here upon the different battles and their successes. (II, 89)

This leaves her free to explore the impact of the conflict on individuals, particularly those whose families, homes and livelihoods are threatened or destroyed. Focusing on the sufferings of the weak and vulnerable (old men, women and children) and attributing them to ‘foreign’ aggression, Parsons brings home to her readers the painful impact of war on civilian populations, not in an attempt to present a radical critique of the British military state, but in order to buttress its security.

The novel’s favourable representation of the British army is an essential part of this endeavour. Although war itself is cruel and destructive, and military defeat inglorious, both the British and American armies perform ‘with undaunted courage and perseverance’ (II, 198) under commanders noted for their ‘honour and humanity’ (II, 165). Whilst the actions of the North administration are presented as arrogant and ill conceived, the troops themselves are absolved from culpability. As one American observer sagely remarks:

the soldiers can’t help it; ‘tis their great masters at home that *send them here*, are to blame (IV, 197).

Like Williams and Scott, Parsons portrays the British officers serving in America as cultured, sociable and compassionate, responding with chivalry to all who are deserving and defenceless, no matter what their political affiliation may be. This is one of the key messages encoded in a cluster of episodes that centre on the activities of a small group of patriotic American women who live in occupied New York ‘under the protection of the British commander’. Although Mrs Arnold and her friends work tirelessly to support their own countrymen, they ‘have never yet met with any insult’ (IV, 165) and are happy to rely on the good conduct of a nation that is reputed ‘not to be ungenerous or cruel to women’ (IV, 168). Crucially, however, and contrary to the accounts given in *Helena* and *Cinthelia*, the sensibility that transcends political divisions is not confined to the military elite. When Henry encounters an American soldier’s widow and her children who have been made destitute by the death of her husband in the war, it is his servant, Andrew, until recently a soldier himself, who first responds to their plight, turning out his pockets to give them all he possesses:

“An please your honour”, said he, sobbing, “I would share the last six-pence with her; the family of a fellow soldier, no matter who he fought for, if he died for his country you know. A poor cripple of a widow, and these fatherless children! I’ll be shot if I would not rather want bread than they should.” (V, 158-9)

Although Andrew is immediately recognizable as a stock literary character, his sympathetic response is politically significant, since it effectively

absolves the common British soldier from the brutality associated with his foreign counterparts.

Whilst the British rank and file do not display the refined courtesy and magnanimity of the officer class, they are nevertheless ‘humane soldiers’ (II, 203), seeking to succour those in need of help and vowing vengeance on the savage foreigners who perpetrate ‘atrocious wickedness’ (II, 205). Their untutored minds and unrefined manners are no barrier to sympathetic feeling. Henry first encounters Andrew after the battle of German Town, when he finds a detachment of British troopers trying to assist a group of distressed Americans. The victims are an old man, his mortally wounded son, and his two young daughters, who have just been raped by a party of foreign soldiers. The son refuses all offers of assistance, convinced that only death can end their shame and suffering, and the onlookers watch helplessly as all the family die in front of them. It is Andrew who voices their collective sense of outrage and despair:

“By G—”, cried he, “sooner would I face a cannon than such a fight as this! If I knew who the villains were that had made such a work of ruin, I would hunt them through the world, and spill my last drop of blood to let out theirs, and revenge this unhappy family.” (II, 205)

Such rough but instinctive sensibility is ‘worth a million of proud, unfeeling spirits’ (II, 206) although it needs to be controlled and guided by superiors with a greater capacity for rational discrimination and self-restraint. When Andrew’s companions endorse his call for vengeance, Henry applauds their

feelings but also strives to impress them with a sense of justice and ‘a detestation of such crimes as must infallibly render them hateful in the eyes of mankind’ (II, 205-6). In this, and in other similar anecdotes, there is a clear determination to rewrite the historical record in order to erase memories of British wartime misconduct, whilst simultaneously retaining a full awareness of the brutality of the conflict. A year before *The Voluntary Exile* was published, Charles Stedman’s well-received and authoritative history of the war had painted a very different picture of the British army:

No sooner had the army entered the Jerseys than the business (we say business, for it was a perfect trade) of plunder began. The friend and the foe, from the hand of rapine, shared alike ...

Their property was seized, and most wantonly destroyed ... in many instances, their families were insulted, stripped of their beds, with other furniture—nay, even of their very wearing apparel.<sup>13</sup>

An accurate historical account would not have served Parsons’ purpose, however. Her deliberate displacement of the savagery of the American War on to an alien ‘other’ is clearly determined by contemporary anxieties.

In the course of the novel Parsons subjects her readers to an extensive catalogue of the evils endemic to a state of war, almost all of which are attributed to foreigners. On Long Island it is ‘the Hessians’ who ‘set fire to every cottage they plunder and destroy’ (II, 102), whilst the rape at German Town is committed by ‘foreigners, savages, worse than the

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<sup>13</sup> Stedman, *A History of the American War*, I, 242.



fiercest beasts' (II, 201). A young American woman living near Philadelphia is robbed of her few possessions by 'some soldiers, who spoke a foreign language' (III, 31), and an unprovoked attack on a New England farm, initially presented as the work of 'a party of English soldiers' (IV, 61) is subsequently identified as the work of 'some foreign troops, in English pay' (V, 96). Even the idyllic rural retreat inhabited by Henry's Quaker friends, Abraham and Rebecca, remains vulnerable to attack by 'the ferocious Hessians' and 'the savage Indians' (II, 120).

Parsons' policy of using the events of the 1770s to give voice to the anxieties of the 1790s is reflected in her disinclination to engage with the political debates concerning the British government's employment of German mercenaries that were prevalent at the time of the American War. Contracted from several different German states, but commonly referred to as Hessians, the German auxiliaries who fought with the British army were feared and despised in almost equal measure.<sup>14</sup> Their 'mechanical art of taking lives' was seen as the antithesis of the civic humanist ideal of the citizen soldier, and the atrocities proverbially attributed to them bolstered civic humanist objections to the professionalization of the armed forces and the maintenance of a standing army.<sup>15</sup> Their mercenary vocation was believed to inculcate a callous disregard of civilian life and a destructive or

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed account of the composition of the British forces in America, see Conway, *The War of American Independence*, pp. 43-71 and *The British Isles and the War of American Independence*, pp. 11-44.

<sup>15</sup> *Reveries of the Heart*, II, 147.

acquisitive attitude to property that is highlighted in several fictional accounts of the American War.<sup>16</sup> None of these concerns is evident in *The Voluntary Exile*, however, where the projection of the impious violence of war on to an ‘alien other’ serves both to salvage tarnished British reputations and to alert readers to the terrifying consequences of allowing the war to be brought home to British soil.

### *Congenial Hearts*

Whilst the unacceptable face of war is projected on to ‘foreigners’ and ‘savages’, the cultural similarities between Britons and Americans elide political and military difference, creating a sense of shared identity rooted in an ideal of Englishness. Despite his growing distaste for a war that ‘has never met [his] decided approbation’ (II, 146), Henry declares his pride in being:

An Englishman, a brother to the Americans, links of one great chain;  
pity they should ever be disunited! but without blaming or defending  
either party, I can honour virtue, and respect those who act from  
principle, though I may lament that those principles differ from mine.  
(IV, 166)

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<sup>16</sup> See *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*, p. 72; Scott, *Helena*, I, 57-8; Lemoine, *The Kentish Curate*, III, 172.

*The Voluntary Exile* does not agonize over the fact of civil war with the intensity that characterizes *Emma Corbett* or *Julia*. Instead, the novel's focus on the underlying affinities between Britons and Americans suggests that the intangible ties of sentimental sociability are stronger and more durable than the fractured bonds of empire and that this represents a source of hope for the future. Henry's friendship with Mr Barclay, 'an American, zealous in the cause of his country', flourishes despite the war, because 'however differently we might think on political subjects, our hearts seem congenial in other points' (III, 131). This congeniality, Parsons suggests, arises from a common sensibility that confirms the intrinsic similarities between two peoples who share a common heritage and a common passion for freedom. The American struggle for liberty and independence is shown to be rooted in their essential Englishness, and is implicitly opposed to the foreign practices that the novel deplors. The friendship between Henry and Barclay also hints at the possibility of a future 'special relationship' of the kind envisaged by John Cartwright, one of the earliest and staunchest supporters of American independence. Cartwright advocated a relationship between Britain and America based on 'a brotherly affection, a manly and independent friendship', and believed that independence would strengthen the ties between the two nations into a lasting union 'between the separate branches of one great family'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cartwright, *American Independence The Interest and Glory of Great-Britain*, p. 13.

The sense of common identity and brotherly affection is enhanced by Parsons' representation of George Washington as the epitome of an elite masculine sensibility that bridges the military and political divide between metropolitan centre and colonial periphery. Not only is the American leader universally admired, but his intrinsic worth is reflected in the devotion with which he inspires all who serve under him. When Henry is wounded and taken prisoner during a skirmish in Pennsylvania he is held at Valley Forge, where he sees 'the wonderful resolution, patience, perseverance, the attachment to their General, which pervaded throughout the whole American camp', and admires the Americans' 'unshaken determination to bear with every inconvenience, and struggle through every difficulty under his command, whom they looked up to as a father and a preserver' (III, 127). Like Pratt in *Emma Corbett*, Parsons stresses the affective ties that underpin Washington's replacement of George III as 'the unifying symbol of the [American] cause and the focal point of the new nation'.<sup>18</sup> Invited to Washington's tent one evening, Henry is received with 'a polite affability that banished reserve' and a cultivated sensibility which avoids any political comment that might cause him embarrassment. He also notes the 'animation, respect and affection' that characterizes the relationship between the American officers and their commander-in-chief:

It was not the distant respect of a subaltern to his General, whose supercilious self-consequence inspired awe and restraint; it was the

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<sup>18</sup> Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington*, p. 204.

involuntary effusions of love and confidence mingled with admiration.  
(III, 134)

In showing how authority and affection can co-exist in fruitful equilibrium, this idealized portrait offers an implicit critique of British government policies in North America. According to one of the novel's protagonists, what alienated the colonists was the way in which Britain '*lorded* it over America', annihilating reciprocal ties of affection and obligation and insisting on the 'unconditional obedience' that characterizes the tyrannical relationship between master and slave (II, 145-6). Had the relationship between imperial centre and colonial periphery been conducted in the spirit of mutual affection and respect that prevails in Washington's camp, Parsons implies, the conflict might have been avoided.

### *Family conflict*

The rarity of this equilibrium, and the struggle to achieve it, is the principle theme of the private family conflicts that are played out against the greater public conflict of the war. Multiple narratives explore the competing demands of patriarchal authority and individual autonomy, and an assortment of different characters attempt to judge and negotiate their relative merits. Few succeed, and those who err are punished. The story of Routier, for example, laments the fate of a young French nobleman who

falls in love with Theresa, a tradesman's daughter. Driven by 'the prejudice of birth and titles', his parents refuse to agree to their marriage and obtain a *lettre de cachet* to consign Theresa to a convent (II, 124-5). In despair at her loss, Routier crosses the Atlantic to support the American fight for independence and is recuperating from wounds received in the battle of Bunker Hill when another young man is brought in, whose leg is so badly damaged that it has to be amputated. The new arrival is soon revealed as Theresa and the lovers are briefly reunited. However, when it becomes apparent that Theresa is dying she acknowledges the validity of their punishment:

We have deserved to suffer; we resisted the will of an earthly father;  
we did wrong, *I* ought to be the victim. (II, 133)

The underlying message of this sentimental but punitive narrative is to recommend submission to lawful forms of authority, however unreasonably they may be exercised. There is a palpable degree of unresolved tension between this repressive code of private morality and the tentative endorsement of colonial aspirations for independence that is suggested by the more public commentary within the text.

The history of the French Abbé Augustine and the young orphan Leonora reveals similar tensions. Augustine abandons his religious vocation in order to marry Leonora and the couple emigrate to America, settling in New England. Augustine joins the American army after their farm is

destroyed by loyalist troops early in the war, and is believed to have died at Bunker Hill. Distraught with grief and in very frail health, Leonora finds refuge in the Moravian community at Bethlehem, where she gradually becomes convinced of the justice of their fate:

Heaven frowns upon our union; my dear Augustine was devoted to his God; for me he broke his vows; for me he fled his country and friends; alas! passion silenced reason, and to its all-powerful influence we sacrificed the dictates of conscience, and blindly gave up all for love.  
(IV, 66)

When Augustine re-appears after a prolonged period of captivity amongst the Indians, and is reunited with Leonora moments before her death, he endorses her judgment:

My mind (said he) is too active for my body, my feelings too strong for my reason, from whence has originated all the misfortunes of my life. I have deserved to suffer for my broken vows, which, though a worldly institution, were voluntarily and solemnly made. (V, 147-8)

The moral dilemma embodied in these narratives is the same conflict between passion and reason that preoccupies Helen Maria Williams in *Julia*.<sup>19</sup> However, Parsons is less adept than Williams in defining the parameters of the conflict and exploring the extent to which characters may be considered responsible for their own tragic fate. As a result, her protagonists seem wantonly oppressed and their deathbed submission to a patriarchal system that has treated them with great cruelty appears

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Eight.

unjustifiably punitive. Readerly sensibilities are frequently challenged by the tragic outcomes meted out to characters with whom they have been encouraged to sympathize and who are only retrospectively judged to have been at fault.

The histories of Routier and Augustine are only two of a number of narratives that explore the rival imperatives of duty and desire. Particularly intriguing is the way in which Parsons recasts the story of Jane Macrea to highlight the same concerns. Instead of setting the story within the public context of Burgoyne's Indian alliances, Parsons chooses to domesticate the tragedy, portraying Jane's death in conventional fictional terms as the result of undisciplined daughterly desire. In her version of the story, Jane, the daughter of a staunch American patriot, conceives an unauthorised passion for a British officer, David Jones. The 'intrigue' is discovered by her father, who banishes Jane to his estate near Fort Edward before enlisting with the American army opposing Burgoyne (IV, 82). Knowing that her lover is with Burgoyne, Jane suffers 'inexpressible agonies' of anxiety. While she continues in 'the most dreadful suspense', marauding Indians attached to the British army plunder the house and carry her into the woods, where they quarrel over whose booty she should be. They are on the point of attacking each other when one of the elders snatches up his tomahawk and kills 'the miserable creature, who was doubtless invoking death to save her from worse impending horrors' (IV, 83). At this very moment, a party of British



soldiers, whose officer ‘proved to be the lover of the unfortunate lady’, arrive on the spot (IV, 84). After a skirmish, in which Jones is killed by a blow from a tomahawk, the Indians flee and the bodies of the two lovers are buried together. This rewriting of Jane’s story effectively reverses the anti-British propaganda associated with early accounts of her death. Jane is no longer the innocent victim of British political and military oppression: her fate is now linked to unauthorized desire, a forbidden liaison, and doomed rebellion against parental authority. Moreover, by making Jones a second victim of the atrocity, Parsons repudiates American attempts to identify the British army with their barbaric allies. The domestication of Jane’s iconic story releases it from the specific ideology of the American revolutionary struggle and makes it available for contemporary consumption.

The most carefully argued example of the clash between duty and desire is the story of Harriot Franklyn, who, alone amongst the novel’s protagonists, distinguishes clearly and acts correctly. After the death of her mother, Harriot is left to the guardianship of Mrs Bailey, a devious and hypocritical woman who has deceitfully wormed her way into Mrs Franklyn’s confidence. Harriot is fully aware of Mrs Bailey’s scheming nature, but refrains from exposing her duplicity in order to ensure tranquillity for her mother’s last hours. However, she also warns her guardian not to exceed the limits of her authority:

I too much reverence my dear mother's mistaken confidence in your seeming friendship, to oppose the authority she has delegated to you ... but have a care, stretch not your power beyond its limits. (IV, 96)

When Mrs Bailey threatens her with a forced marriage, Harriot insists on her right of refusal:

I am neither your child, nor your slave: you may *prevent* me from marrying until I am of age, but you cannot *force* me to unite myself with any man; I am a free agent in that respect, and you shall find that I will be so. (IV, 107)

There are clear parallels between Harriot's resolute resistance to domestic tyranny and colonial defiance of imperial measures that are regarded as despotic. Harriot's insistence on the limited nature of Mrs Bailey's authority echoes John Dickinson's assessment of the mutual rights and obligations governing the relationship between the colonies and the metropolis:

Our duty resembles that of children to a parent. The parent has a power over them: but they have rights, what [*sic*] the parent cannot take away.<sup>20</sup>

These parallels are not pursued in any schematic way, however, and the evident differences between the contractual nature of guardianship and the affective relationships that characterize the patriarchal family remain unexplored. Nor does the novel offer any final adjudication between the rival claims of imperial authority and colonial autonomy. In the domestic

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<sup>20</sup> John Dickinson, *A New Essay by the Pennsylvanian Farmer on the Constitutional Power of Great-Britain over the Colonies in America* (Philadelphia; London: reprinted for J. Almon, 1774), p. 123.

narratives, broken vows and the repudiation of patriarchal authority are strictly punished, whereas the ideological implications of the armed rebellion that dominates the novel's public narrative are left largely unresolved.

The novel's multiple narratives provide a variety of contexts in which these conflicts are exposed to view. In the private sphere, the courtship narratives examine the competing claims of parental authority and filial desire, and attempt to police the boundaries between them. In the public arena, these boundaries are disputed on the battlefield and the calamitous consequences are outlined in a series of distressing tales in which war is presented as an unmitigated evil. However, whilst the pacifist response of Henry's Quaker friends is presented as both brave and admirable, the novel's enthusiastic endorsement of Washington confirms that national defence remains a civic imperative. At a time of growing national crisis, *The Voluntary Exile* offers one significant corrective to the 'enervating description of tender sentiments' that the *Critical Review* deplored so strongly. A number of women in the novel present robust and positive images of female patriotism for the reader's edification. The daughter-in-law of the elderly couple with whom Biddulph lodges in New York refuses to accompany her father when he deserts to the English, even though she will be penniless if she remains. Resisting his threats and entreaties, she insists that she will never be 'so wicked to break my vows

and desert with you to the enemies of my country' (IV, 195). And although Mrs Arnold and Mrs Nesbitt lament their lost relatives, they proudly reflect that it is 'every man's duty to sacrifice himself in the defence of his country' (IV, 166). Despite their private grief, loss of property, and personal danger, they continue to support the American cause:

We are not Stoic's, [sic] to see our husbands, brothers, children, cut off for ever; our property destroyed, even our own personal safety endangered every moment; we do not see all this with apathy, or a false heroism — no, we feel, keenly feel, our misfortunes; but the necessity, the duty that called them forth to venture all in defence of their country and their freedom, supercedes all selfish considerations; and though our tears will flow from tenderness, they are unaccompanied by any regret. We glory that our sons, our brothers, have performed their duty, though we are the sufferers. (IV, 167)

Although they live under enemy occupation, the women make linen for distribution to the American troops, and to their wives and families who are trapped in the city. By remaining politically quiescent, they avoid confrontation with the occupying forces and are able to continue their charitable work, even extending occasional assistance to British soldiers who are sick or in need of help. Their experience shows that whilst war taxes women's emotional, financial and physical resources in distressing ways, it also offers them the opportunity to make an active contribution to the national enterprise without overstepping the bounds of female propriety. The increasing threat of French invasion allowed women's involvement

with the military activity of the state to be imagined and presented in more proactive ways. When the danger intensified, female engagement in martial enterprise was re-imagined in a dramatic and unconventional manner, as my final chapter will demonstrate.

## Chapter 12: Fostering Resistance

### *Cinthelia; or, A Woman of Ten Thousand (1797)*

When George Walker subjected the heroine of his novel *Cinthelia* to the trials and tribulations of the American War of Independence, he openly acknowledged that historical accuracy was the least of his concerns:

With the historical facts of the American war I have taken a few liberties, transposing time and place; but as to the incidents themselves, many actually took place: and every war will furnish fact, if possible, more horrid.<sup>1</sup>

Walker's account pays no attention to the disputes concerning political rights that provoked the confrontation between Britain and the North American colonies, nor to the traumas and anxieties engendered by a civil war. Instead, the novel uses the conflict to generate a spirit of national defiance and resistance to foreign aggression amongst social groups (most notably women and the rising commercial class) who are seldom included in discourses of patriotism.

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<sup>1</sup> George Walker, *Cinthelia; or, A Woman of Ten Thousand*, 4 vols (London: B Crosby, 1797), I, pp. vi-vii. Further references to this edition appear in parentheses in the text.

George Walker (1772-1847) was a London bookseller, music publisher and novelist who is chiefly remembered today for his anti-Jacobin political satire, *The Vagabond*.<sup>2</sup> *Cinthelia; or, A Woman of Ten Thousand* was his fifth novel. Published in December 1797, it was favourably reviewed in the London periodicals and a French translation appeared two years later.<sup>3</sup> *Cinthelia* provides an admonitory exposition of the consequences of an ill advised marriage and gives an account of virtuous female conduct in circumstances of domestic distress and personal danger. The heroine's experiences with the British army in America, where her private female virtues modify and extend masculine paradigms of patriotism, are the most striking and original element in an otherwise conventional anatomy of a dutiful wife's prolonged persecution by her 'brutal and profligate' husband.<sup>4</sup> Parallel constructions of femininity and nationality draw on an ideal of duty enlarged beyond pious resignation or stoic acquiescence by a spirit of determination, enterprise and resistance, which Walker uses to foster the renaissance of domestic and civic virtue and to offer new paradigms of patriotism that will ensure national survival.

Set primarily in the City of London during the late 1770s and early 1780s, the novel opens with an examination of the difficulties surrounding the selection of a suitable marriage partner and goes on to explore the evils

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<sup>2</sup> George Walker, *The Vagabond* (London: G. Walker, 1799).

<sup>3</sup> George Walker, *Cinthelia, ou, Une Sur Dix Mille*, trad. de l'anglais par P. L. Bas (Hamburg: P. F. Fauche, 1799).

<sup>4</sup> *Analytical Review*, 27 (1798), 415-7 (p. 415).

that result from a mistaken choice. Cinthelia Hendon, the cherished only child of a prosperous city trader, returns from boarding school to make her entrance into life just as her father's financial position is rendered precarious by the chicanery of his partner, Ranson. In order to secure her parents' future, Cinthelia is persuaded to put aside her feelings for Ranson's son Edward, and accept an offer of marriage from Harry Mobile, the son of a wealthy city contractor. The plebeian origins embodied in Harry's family name (an eighteenth-century term for 'the populace' as opposed to the nobility) are associated with a social ambition that manifests itself in a determination 'to imitate the vices of what is termed high life' (I, 39).<sup>5</sup> After his marriage Harry engages in a life of gambling and dissipation, squanders his fortune, abuses his wife and children, and seeks to extricate himself from debt by countenancing the seduction of Cinthelia by his noble companion and creditor, Sir Charles Higham. Clinging to 'the small shining light of *duty*' (III, 28), Cinthelia resists Sir Charles's advances and forcibly repulses his two attempts at rape. Her eventual escape from the marital home, in defiance of her husband's attempts to detain her, is authorized by her father and assisted by the London mob. After a period of separation, Harry's illness and apparent repentance persuade Cinthelia to agree to a reconciliation, but his reformation is short-lived. Sinking deeper into degradation and inebriation, he falls into the hands of a recruiting party and

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<sup>5</sup> See the definitions of 'mobile' and 'mobility' in Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* and the *OED*.



is enlisted in the army while still in a drunken stupor. Viewing Cinthelia as a useful adjunct, he insists that she accompany him to America, threatening to take her children instead if she does not agree. With no one to turn to after her father's death, Cinthelia is forced to acquiesce.

As this brief synopsis suggests, the early volumes of the novel are heavily indebted to Richardson's *Clarissa* and the novels that followed in its wake. Walker's exploration of the conflict between parental authority and filial autonomy in matters of marital choice follows the example set by Richardson's protégée, Frances Sheridan, in *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*. Unlike *Clarissa*, whose tribulations are the result of her resistance to familial control, Cinthelia suffers because she, like Sidney, accedes to the wishes of her parents against her own inclinations.<sup>6</sup> In true Richardsonian fashion, Walker pits his virtuous heroine against the wiles of an aristocratic seducer who deliberately and self-consciously models himself on Lovelace. Sir Charles treats Cinthelia's determined refusal of his advances as a challenge to his invention and ingenuity, borrowing Lovelace's words to describe how the aphrodisiac effects of resistance spur him to greater efforts:

It is *Resistance* that inflames desire,  
Sharpens the darts of Love, and blows his fire:  
Love is disarm'd, that meets with too much ease,

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<sup>6</sup> Frances Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, 3 vols (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761).

He languishes, and does not care to please! (III, 19) <sup>7</sup>

However, even as Walker pays homage to Richardson and cites his moral and literary authority to excuse the ‘too vivid colours’ of the bedroom scenes in *Cinthelia*, he simultaneously announces a determination to adapt the Richardsonian narrative to a new purpose (I, vi). As Watson and others have argued, the sentimental seduction plot acquired new and specifically political resonances in the wake of the French Revolution and Walker is fully alive to these topical reverberations.<sup>8</sup> His avowed intention in *Cinthelia* is to use the seduction narrative to expose ‘the erroneous idea, that a man, in certain situations, is master of a woman ... and at the same time to strengthen the maxim of Queen Elizabeth; which was — that, without the *will*, no woman could be conquered’ (I, vi). Through the identification of his fictional heroine with England’s iconic symbol of female resistance, Walker reconfigures the novel of female sensibility as a paradigm of national endurance.

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. by Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 609.

<sup>8</sup> Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*; Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*; Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*.

### *Fostering resistance*

The most traumatic of the many trials and tribulations that disturb Cinthelia's peace is the threatened invasion of her body by a lascivious admirer. For the British nation in 1797, the danger lay in the real and imminent threat of military invasion by France. On the European mainland, Napoleon's successful Italian campaign of 1796-7 had removed Austria from the war, leaving Britain without continental allies, and the *coup d'état* of 18 Fructidor (4 September 1797) returned the French government to Jacobin control, bringing peace negotiations to an abrupt end.<sup>9</sup> At home, Britain's confidence in the navy on which her survival depended had been rocked by mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in the first part of the year and was only partially restored by Admiral Duncan's victory over the Dutch at Camperdown in October.<sup>10</sup> The national anxiety already evident in the passing of the Supplementary Militia Act of 1796 to raise additional manpower for national defence had been intensified by General Hoche's attempt to land French troops in Bantry Bay in December 1796, and by the successful landing near Fishguard in February 1797 of a small French force under the command of William Tate, an American who had fought against Britain in the War of Independence.<sup>11</sup> Although the first attempt had been

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<sup>9</sup> Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State*, pp. 75-80.

<sup>10</sup> *Annual Register*, 1797, pp. 207-22; James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (London: Deutsch, 1966).

<sup>11</sup> The act's provisions are outlined by Colley, *Britons*, p. 302. For further commentary on the mood of national anxiety, see Mark Rawlinson, 'Invasion! Coleridge, The Defence of

rendered abortive by bad weather and the second had been easily repulsed, the two expeditions had demonstrated the unprotected state of much of the nation's coastline and its vulnerability to France's newly formed 'Army of England', then assembling across the channel. In this moment of national crisis, Walker's story fosters a spirit of heroic resolution and resistance.

As a paradigm of resistance, *Cinthelia* operates on several, sometimes conflicting, levels. The heroine's steadfast adherence to duty, in the face of both her husband's ill-treatment and Sir Charles's seductive blandishments, is a tacit refutation of the radical justification of revolution as a response to tyranny. However, when the sovereign territory of her own body is threatened, resistance becomes both mandatory and virtuous, 'for there are duties we owe to ourselves, which supersede every other claim' (I, 187). Her vigorous efforts to repel Sir Charles's assaults, conveyed in lively, dramatic, and often prurient detail, distinguish her from those sentimental heroines whose creators' sense of class or gender propriety precludes such militant resistance. Even Sir Charles is astonished 'that a woman like Cinthelia, of so delicate a constitution, so tender a disposition, and in so trying a situation, should be capable of so great resolution' (III, 48). Successfully repulsing two well planned rape attempts, she exhibits determination, presence of mind and an unconventional willingness to engage in physical combat in order to defend herself.

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Britain and The Cultivation of the Public's Fear', in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict 1793-1822*, ed. by Philip Shaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 110-37.

Walker is by no means the only novelist of the 1790s to exploit the link between domestic morality and national virtue that is embodied in the figure of the sexually vulnerable heroine.<sup>12</sup> However, in comparison with the ‘vitriolic diatribe against post-Bastille Jacobinism and sansculotte-style mob rule’ that would characterize *The Vagabond* two years later, Walker’s critique of British society in *Cinthelia* is curiously old-fashioned, chiefly reflecting fears, shared by many eighteenth-century commentators, concerning middle class aspirations to imitate the conspicuous consumption and dissolute morals of their superiors.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Hannah More, who believed that it was ‘not so much the force of French bayonets, as the contamination of French principles, that ought to excite our apprehensions’, Walker is more concerned with the dangers of invasion from abroad than with the possibility of revolutionary insurrection at home.<sup>14</sup> As he constructs the narrative of Cinthelia’s experiences during the American War around a series of battlefield images that show the nation under attack, it is clear that his primary purpose in carrying the story to America is not to adjudicate the relative merits of imperial domination and colonial aspiration, but to make visible the effects of war, which must be understood if the threat of invasion is to be resisted. Whilst Cinthelia’s earlier sexual and domestic traumas

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<sup>12</sup> This was a favourite device of Anti-Jacobin novelists. See, for example, Jane West, *A Tale of the Times* (London: Longman and Rees, 1799) and Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1800).

<sup>13</sup> W. M. Verhoeven, ‘Introduction’ to George Walker, *The Vagabond* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2004), p.12.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah More, *Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont, Made in the National Convention of France, on the Subjects of Religion and Public Education* (London: T. Cadell, 1793), p. 44.

figuratively embody the national vulnerability to invasion and occupation, the American episodes (re)present these dangers in material form.

In pursuit of this nationalistic agenda, *Cinthelia*, more than any other novel in this study, sets the American War of Independence in its wider international context. By the end of the 1770s, the domestic dispute between Britain and her North American colonies had developed into a conflict on a global scale, as France, Spain and Holland all declared war on Britain and the fighting spread to the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, West Africa and India.<sup>15</sup> As Walker contemplates the threat of French post-revolutionary military expansion in the 1790s, he contextualizes the “American” War as a manifestation of ancient and on-going Franco-British rivalry rather than as a quarrel between pugnacious fellow-nationals. From this perspective, the constitutional and domestic origins of the dispute are unimportant and remain obscure and unexplored. As the moment of embarkation approaches, only Cinthelia echoes Orlando Somerive’s concern to know ‘for what is all this?’, but her question is both unvoiced and unanswered (III, 212).<sup>16</sup> Any doubts concerning the nature of the imperial enterprise are silenced by the laudatory rehearsal of national virtue called forth by the departure from native shores. Cinthelia’s praise for the moral and political values of the country that she leaves behind, where ‘the people repose in peace and security, while rapine overruns every other quarter of the globe’ (III, 229), is

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<sup>15</sup> Conway, *The British Isles and The War of American Independence*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 298.

echoed by her friend and protector, Major Watson, who looks forward to a time when the reform of public life will contribute to a national renaissance:

I was thinking ... that in all my various travels, I never met with a country equal to England, either for productions, laws, or happiness, and yet the people are oppressed by variety of causes. — What a nation would it be if bribery and corruption were exterminated! The glory of the world — the emporium of commerce — the asylum of humanity and peace; she might rise so high in the scale of perfection, that we should no longer seek to discover the situation of the terrestrial paradise. (III, 230)

His patriotic enthusiasm does not imply approval for government policy in North America, which he vehemently condemns, although he does not say why. Like Smith's Lieutenant Fleming, he prides himself on the professionalism of his calling:

I fight for my country — War is unfortunately my trade; and when we are engaged in a war, we must either go through with it, right or wrong, or submit to the insults of the enemy, always ready to tread upon our necks. (III, 231)

The major's language suggests that his understanding of military professionalism is more powerfully informed by notions of patriotic pride and national honour than that to which Smith's pragmatic lieutenant subscribes.<sup>17</sup> Watson's sentiments typify the conservative and chauvinistic construction of patriotism characterized by the 'conviction of ... superior value' and 'that spirit of rivalry and ambition', which Richard Price had

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, p. 308.

so vehemently rejected in his Revolution Day sermon. Although the major does not approve of the cause for which he fights, his loyalties remain focused on his native land. His patriotism is defined largely in terms of hostility to his country's enemies, particularly the traditional enemy across the Channel. By setting the American War in its wider international context, and focusing on France as a primary opponent, Walker is able to draw on familiar paradigms to underwrite the link between professional loyalty and patriotic purpose.

### *Naval Conflict*

Foremost amongst such comforting axioms was the widely accepted view that the acknowledged superiority of the French army was matched by the equally unconquerable might of the British navy, a conviction reiterated by Captain Boyse when Major Watson informs him of the approach of three French warships:

This is just as I wished. They shall soon see what mettle Captain Boyse carries — Hey, my brave Major, we'll soon humble *Mounseer*, and teach him to touch us on our own element! — At land, indeed, begging your pardon, Major, they always have the best of it; but, d'ye see, it's another thing at sea! (III, 258)



However, the received wisdom that British national security rested on a platform of insular integrity, preserved and protected by her naval supremacy, had been severely undermined by the mutinies of 1797.<sup>18</sup> Imagined conflict, such as the naval battle in *Cinthelia*, was one way of reshaping and reconstructing that traditional confidence. Only one man amongst the crew fails to rise to the challenge; inspired by the ebullient leadership of Captain Boyse, the remainder take up their posts, their ‘breasts glowing with ardor’ as the three French ships turn towards them (IV, 1-2). The ensuing action presents a stirring, and therefore reassuring, evocation of the spirit of ‘Old England’, in which the British are distinguished by boldness, courage and tenacity, laced with rash bravado and coarse wit, and the French by superior numbers and firepower, and a willingness to retreat. Captain Boyse exhorts his men to ‘conquer or die’, refusing to strike his flag in surrender to a French ship ‘as long as he has a gun to speak’ (IV, 8). The crew respond enthusiastically. Roared on by the captain and by Major Watson, ‘two men, who regarded death not the value of a rope’s end’, the sailors ‘fought with the obstinacy of their native bull-dogs, while the sweat ran from every pore’ (IV, 3). One man loses an arm, but refuses to leave his post, even when ordered to do so, for ‘if he could not load a gun, he had an arm to fire one’, whilst another, who had the brains of one of his

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<sup>18</sup> Geoff Quilley, ‘Duty and Mutiny: The Aesthetics of Loyalty and the Representation of the British Sailor c. 1789-1800’, in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict*, pp. 80-109.

companions dashed in his face, coolly observed that ‘he never knew Dick throw away so much good sense in his life before’ (IV, 4).

According to David McNeil, who labels it grotesque, this ‘grim, sarcastic humour’ is characteristic of many eighteenth-century literary treatments of war and is generally deployed to interrogate conventional constructions of glory and heroism.<sup>19</sup> In Walker’s hands, however, its purpose is clearly patriotic and sentimental rather than satiric. At the end of a year in which the loyalties of British seamen had been seriously called into question, his depiction of the sailor as the indomitable ‘jolly tar’ of Garrick’s popular nationalistic song re-appropriates and reinforces a traditional stereotype whose ownership had been contested by the mutineers.<sup>20</sup> The petitioners at Spithead had included ‘a warm declaration of their readiness to be true to their character as Englishmen and defenders of their country’ in support of their demands, and both the concessions they were offered and the pardons they obtained were facilitated by a wide recognition and acceptance of the patriotic identity they claimed.<sup>21</sup> The mutiny at the Nore, however, had been regarded in a very different light, as the account in the *Annual Register* makes clear:

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<sup>19</sup> David McNeil, *The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Garrick’s lyrics were written to celebrate the British victories of 1759; some time thereafter the line ‘jolly tars are our men’ was changed to ‘heart of oak are our men’.

<sup>21</sup> *Annual Register*, 1797, ‘History of Europe’, p. 209.

For the combinations at Portsmouth and Plymouth there certainly was not only a plausible pretext, but, in truth, too much reason: but that at Sheerness ... was not impelled by necessity, or provoked by unjust aggression or neglect. It was impatient of authority, factious, seditious, progressive in its demands, intent on civil discord and convulsion.<sup>22</sup>

According to Admiral Duncan, it was only by resisting the call of the Nore mutineers that British sailors could prove themselves still to be loyal defenders of ‘that liberty which has been handed down to us by our ancestors, and which I trust we shall maintain to the latest posterity’.<sup>23</sup> When the Nore mutineers eventually resumed their posts, the ringleaders were severely punished. There were twenty-nine hangings, including Richard Parker, the London Corresponding Society member who was widely credited with fomenting the disaffection, and it was not until the Battle of Camperdown later in the year that an apprehensive nation was finally reassured that their navy continued to be activated by the ‘truly British spirit’ that was traditionally promulgated as its distinguishing characteristic.<sup>24</sup> The naval action in *Cintheia* is Camperdown in miniature, short, grim, bloody and heroic:

At every broadside given and received, the vessel quivered like the recoil of a tightened bowstring — her decks were covered with the limbs of men, and her yards and masts came tumbling down with a

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<sup>22</sup> Op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> *Annual Register*, 1797, ‘Chronicle’, p. 76.

crash, or hung about their ears. Never was greater magnanimity displayed; and the true spirit of a British tar shone triumphant. (IV, 3-4).

The primary significance of Walker's fictional battle is that, like Camperdown, it can be recognized as 'an action, which did honour to the British name, adding one more example of the unconquerable soul of a British seaman' (IV, 12). Both the actual and the imagined conflict operate in similar ways to rebuild traditional images of loyalty and restore confidence in a channel fleet which, only months earlier, had been in a state of mutiny.

Mary Favret has argued that public representations of war in the years between 1793 and 1815 form 'a paper shield ... against the destructive violence of war', distancing its impact and filtering its meaning through the experience of victims (widows, orphans and veterans) left in its wake.<sup>25</sup> In its direct representation of martial confrontations, *Cinthelia* must be regarded as running counter to this tendency. Moreover, on those occasions when the experience of war is filtered through the medium of female spectatorship, the women's physical and emotional proximity to the conflict reinforces, rather than diminishes, the horror of the event. The naval action in Walker's novel is presented from two opposite, but equally valid, perspectives: that of the men engaged in the action on deck and that of the women, who are confined below deck in a room next to the surgeon's

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<sup>25</sup> Favret, 'Coming Home: The Public Spaces of Romantic War', p. 539.

cockpit. As the battle, which ‘required more than female fortitude’ (IV, 1), rages above them, Cinthelia and her companion, Mrs Jackson, ‘wept, in their little room, the horrors of war’ (IV, 5). Although they are spared the sight of ‘the sons of men butchering each other, amidst thunder, smoke, and fire’ (IV, 5), their senses are assailed by the noise and stench of the battle. Stifled by the heat, their throats raw from inhaling sulphurous smoke, nauseated by the vibration that accompanied each broadside, deafened by the thunder of the cannon on the gun decks and yet unable to blot out the cries of the wounded in the next cabin, they ‘found it impossible to sit anywhere but on the floor, where they remained, pale as ashes, and without uttering a single word’ (IV, 6). Their stillness and silence is in powerful contrast to the noise and confusion of the action above, on which their fate and that of the ship (and, synecdochically, that of the nation) depend. If the glory and violence of battle are most visible in the public arena on deck, the anguish and suffering are most apparent in the private space below. Neither experience alone can reflect the true nature of war; together they represent an acknowledgement both of its necessity and its cost.

*The Carolina Campaign*

In contrast to a representation of naval conflict that celebrates martial belligerence as enthusiastically as it laments the consequent loss and suffering, the novel's vivid account of the British army's Carolina campaign of 1780-81 presents a much darker picture of military combat. Unlike the contest at sea, the war on land is not simply the clash of opposing states: it is also the merciless and indiscriminate slaughter of defenceless men, women and children. However, Walker's horrific account of the brutality that characterizes the British advance is not presented as an indictment of imperial oppression. His identification of the British as foreign invaders terrorizing an indigenous population can more aptly be construed as a foreshadowing of the violence that might accompany a foreign invasion of Britain. The uncontrollable savagery of the soldiery, and the vain efforts of the officers to restrain them, suggest the excesses, both real and imaginary, of the French revolutionary mob:

In vain the officers endeavoured to reason them [the soldiers] into humanity — the doors were wrenched open, and the unsuspecting inhabitants murdered in their beds. (IV, 33)

As in France, women are present at these violent confrontations as instigators, participants, spectators and victims. The sergeant's wife, Mrs Tanjore, urges the men on:

“You ought all to be ripped up alive,” said she, “if you suffer any Yankee to escape, the height of a sixpennyworth of halfpence! D—n them, do ‘em all up!” (IV, 33)

When the soldiers are unable to force open the door of one cottage, she physically assists them to scale the wall and gain entrance to the house through the window, where, ‘having, with their bayonets, murdered a man and his wife, they threw their child, an infant, into the street’ (IV, 34). As Cinthelia sits on a nearby log, exhausted by the march and dazed by the barbarity and cruelty she witnesses all around her, an Indian woman carrying a child is viciously clubbed to the ground in front of her. Cinthelia’s anguished plea to spare her life is unavailing, and the soldier ‘plunged his bayonet into the body of the woman, repeating the thrust, while she wretched in anguish, twining her limbs round his legs’ (IV, 35). The rhetoric of sexual violence reinforces the obscenity of his act. According to Colley, it was images such as these that fuelled volunteer recruitment in Britain as invasion fears mounted and men were ‘bombarded with tales of French oppression and atrocities in other lands and constantly told that only they could prevent similar evils from befalling their own shores’.<sup>26</sup> Walker’s representation of the American War is an assault on civilian sensibilities, calculated to bring home the reality of war for precisely such a purpose.

Cinthelia’s enforced experience of military campaigning is crucial to Walker’s enterprise of realizing the materiality of war for a domestic

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<sup>26</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 326.

audience. Whilst hard-bitten and experienced camp followers such as Mrs Tanjore ‘support the march with firmness, equal to the stoutest veteran’, Cinthelia suffers under ‘an accumulation of evils’, jolted in an open wagon by day, oppressed by heat so sultry that she is often close to fainting, and numbed into immobility by the damp that seeps through the straw of her tent each night. (IV, 24). Set apart from the army she accompanies by her feminine sensibility and physical frailty, Cinthelia shares their sense of alienation and exhaustion as they pursue an elusive enemy through hostile terrain. During engagements, however, the representation of her anxiety and distress provides a subversive counterpoint to the gendered masculine rhetoric of the battlefield. When the Americans mount a night attack on an entrenched British position the British soldiers respond in confusion and alarm, the officers running about with swords drawn and the men flying to their posts ‘half awake and half naked’ (IV, 40). In the meantime:

Cinthelia and Mrs Jackson sat upon a bed of straw, leaning upon each other, sick with horror, not so much for their own danger as at the almost indescribable scene that was transacting. — The thunder of the cannon, the shouts of the soldiers, the clashing of the muskets, the whistling of the balls, and the bursting of shells, combined at once to add terrors to a night alone illumined by the flashes of the firing and a few torches. Several balls rushed through the canvas of the tent where they sat, and a dog was killed, as he stood howling and trembling at the door, by the bursting of a shell. (IV, 42)



Their private, feminine response, full of apprehension and horror, throws the public, masculine world of war into sharp relief, and exposes the contradictory imperatives of glory and humanity. Martial belligerence and domestic sensibility exist side by side, occupying separate but contiguous spaces, and exhibiting a fundamental incompatibility that is highlighted by juxtaposition. The death of the dog is a trivial matter compared to the carnage of battle, but its mundane reality subverts the grandiose rhetoric of war.

The domestication of the field of conflict through homely imagery challenges the bellicose ideology that validates the anarchic and inhuman destruction of war. An equally subversive rescripting of martial bellicosity underpins Walker's representation of the major battle that takes place a few days later. As the two opposing armies assemble on the plain in full military splendour, with bands playing, flags flying, and a 'forest of polished muskets' glittering in the sun, Cinthelia and Mrs Jackson, watching from the hillside above, recognize the stirring martial music as 'the tocsin of death' and perceive that the 'gaudy parade of military grandeur' is, in reality, a sacrificial procession (IV, 45-6). Their acuity is a facet of gendered sensibility, a femininity, which, as the narratorial voice caustically observes, is 'uninspired with the charms of glory, and unacquainted with the exalted delight of being victorious in a field of slaughter' (IV, 46). However, as they watch the distant ebb and flow of the battle, their feminist critique of martial

ideology is complicated by personal and patriotic loyalties that modify their earlier pacifist response:

A dead and awful silence reigned in the camp, every one waiting in fearful suspense, now making motions of joy, when the English seemed to advance upon the enemy, and then turning pale with despair, when they appeared in turn to retreat. (IV, 49)

There is a measure of ambivalence, too, in Walker's unstable valuation of military valour. As the British regiments march to battle, he ironically observes that 'a few drams of brandy inspired the soldiers with courage truly heroic' (IV, 45). At the same time he approves the 'exertions of astonishing spirit' exhibited by many of the combatants, particularly the 'obstinacy and vigour, that declared the resolution of the Americans in their cause, or that they, at least, inherited a portion of the spirit of their ancestors' (IV, 48). Yet this same spirit also drives the merciless onslaught of the American cavalry that finally causes the two women to avert their eyes, 'unable to behold men hewed to pieces in every form, and cut down like the underwood of a forest' (IV, 50). If moral validity resides, as it well may, in patriotic exertion to defend the homeland against a foreign invader, Walker fails to make this clear.

In a perceptive reading of Coleridge's 'Fears in Solitude', which was written in February 1798, only two months after *Cinthelia* was published, Mark Rawlinson argues that a rehearsal of the horrors of war which is aimed at mobilizing resistance to invasion 'lends itself both to opposition to

war and violent opposition to an enemy', and he identifies this tension between 'bellicosity and revulsion' as characteristic of patriotic alarmism.<sup>27</sup> *Cinthelia* oscillates somewhat uncertainly between these two extremes and the tensions between them are made more apparent by the fact that Walker's fictional representations of conflict have a factual basis. Behind *Cinthelia's* vivid evocations of the panic and chaos of battle, lies the historic reality of the American War and the uncomfortable awareness that the Carolina campaign terminated in national humiliation at Yorktown. Whilst the officers and men of the navy perform with patriotic heroism and are rewarded with victory, the army is destined for defeat and its conduct is suspect from the start. When Colonel Jackson's corps are stationed in the rear, their remit is as much 'to prevent the army flying, as to second any emergency, or cover an inevitable retreat' (IV, 45). As the American cavalry break through the English lines, retreating British soldiers abandon their posts and fly in all directions, some plundering the stores, some dressing in the officers' clothes, and many staggering under the weight of stolen property that they are forced to abandon in order to cross the river. Two or three of the men forcibly embrace Cinthelia and Mrs Jackson, who release themselves only after considerable exertion. At this moment of imminent danger, Cinthelia proves as capable of defending her honour against an ungovernable rabble as she was against a licentious aristocrat. Displaying

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<sup>27</sup> Rawlinson, 'Invasion! Coleridge, the Defence of Britain and the Cultivation of the Public's Fear', pp. 121, 118.

‘particular coolness and resolution’, she ‘snatched up a brace of pistols, which lay in the Colonel’s tent, and giving Mrs Jackson one, intimidated the soldiers from further insult’ (IV, 53).

If the prospect of defeat again reveals the British lower ranks as an unruly mob, it also recasts Cinthelia as a martial heroine. When Major Watson arrives to rally the men, he advises Cinthelia and Mrs Jackson to join the retreat. Mounted on baggage horses, and pursued by the enemy, the two women ‘ride forward with exertion that surprised many of the men’, dodging rifle fire and leaping over deep ravines in the process, despite being ‘nearly overcome with fear, fatigue, and heat’ (IV, 57). Many of those who escape on horseback are able to outdistance the enemy pursuit and by the end of the day they form a company more than a hundred strong. As night falls, they take possession of a large plantation house and make themselves at home in approved military fashion, stripping the orchard of its fruit and ransacking the wine cellar. They are still congratulating themselves on their good fortune when they discover that they have been surrounded by an enemy force composed of French as well as American troops. There can be no doubt that Walker’s representation of a group of beleaguered Britons, besieged and outnumbered by French forces and their allies, would resonate powerfully in the context of the invasion fears of 1797. Despite being taken by surprise, the speed and the extent of the British anti-invasion measures are admirable:

The bottom of the house was instantly barricaded with the furniture, and a party stationed below, with their swords drawn, to repel any attempt at entrance; the rest drew up in form on the first floor, by way of embankment placing the large deal table, and some loose boards, before the windows, in at which a smart shower of bullets rattled. Cinthelia and Mrs Jackson, together with half a dozen of the men, stood behind loading the muskets, and then handing them to those employed in firing, by which means the discharges were not intermitted a moment. Mrs Jackson soon sunk beneath her employ, but Cinthelia, though the sweat and exertion obliged her to strip off her gown, continued at her station (IV, 60)

The women's transformation from distant spectatorship to active resistance (which has been foreshadowed by the cool determination with which they have defended themselves against sexual attack and the intrepidity of their riding during the retreat) signals a revaluation of the ideal of patriotic femininity in response to the imminence of invasion.

Historical studies show that in times of conflict eighteenth-century British women of all social classes played an important civic role in supporting the war effort.<sup>28</sup> The unpaid labour of large numbers of predominantly lower class camp followers was essential to the functioning of the army both at home and abroad and some of these women are known to have taken a combative role on occasions. After the Battle of Camperdown an officer on the *Ardent* described how one of the men's

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<sup>28</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 251-96; Wilson, *The Island Race*, pp. 92-128; Sylvia R. Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Mayer, *Belonging to the Army*.

wives ‘assisted in firing a gun where her husband was quartered, though frequently requested to go below, but she would not be prevailed on to do so until a shot carried away one of her legs and wounded the other’.<sup>29</sup> There were also many well publicized accounts of transvestite women serving as combatants and of elite ladies who accompanied their husbands on campaign and contributed a degree of domestic comfort and social conviviality to camp life.<sup>30</sup> There is, however, no evidence of gently bred women taking part in combat in the way that Walker describes in *Cinthelia*. What his fiction rather startlingly proposes is the willingness and capacity of virtuous middle-class womanhood to overstep gender boundaries and to cast aside restrictive constructions of femininity, as Cinthelia sheds her dress, when the national interest requires. Almost as startling, is his suggestion that such heroic female patriotism may flourish even in the absence of romantic devotion. Two years later, when Mary Robinson applauded the intrepidity of Englishwomen who abandoned their peaceful homes and ‘the indulgence of feminine amusements’ in order to ‘brave the very heat of battle’, she attributed their willingness to ‘hazard their existence’ to ‘the very heroism of love’.<sup>31</sup> However, although Mrs Jackson is ‘a pattern of love’, a conventional representation of those army wives

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<sup>29</sup> Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, p. 411.

<sup>30</sup> Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry 1650-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England*, p. 60.

who, like Lady Harriet Acland, preferred the hardships of war to separation from their husbands, Cinthelia has been compelled to travel to America against her will by a husband whom she dislikes and despises, and is sustained only by an ideal of duty (III, 238). Lacking Lady Harriet's romantic motivation and aristocratic rank, Cinthelia is a less glamorous and more bourgeois incarnation of Britannia.<sup>32</sup>

Despite their heroic resistance, Cinthelia and her companions are compelled to evacuate the plantation house when the enemy set fire to it:

Mrs Jackson fainted, and the whole became a scene of confusion: no choice of action remained — the bottom door was thrown open, at which the little army sallied out, sword in hand, animated by courage, and desperate, from the nature of their situation: the enemy received them with a phalanx of bayonets, upon which the English precipitated themselves, like so many frantic lions. (IV, 61)

Those in the front rank sustain dreadful losses, but the men behind them succeed in forcing their way out of the house just as a party of British infantry appear, headed by 'the gallant Colonel Jackson, who had come in pursuit of his wife' (IV, 62). Although Cinthelia succeeds in dragging her unconscious friend out of the flames and into the garden, her life-saving effort proves unavailing, since Mrs Jackson regains consciousness 'only to witness greater calamity, in the death of her husband' (IV, 62). She relapses into insensibility and although Cinthelia persuades one of the troopers to

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<sup>32</sup> The exploits of Harriet Acland are described in Chapter One.

carry her on his horse, she dies soon afterwards. Before leaving the plantation, however, the British ‘lions’ who so steadfastly resisted the enemy and who fought their way out of the besieged house with such desperate courage, wreak their revenge:

Exhausted as they were, revenge inspired them with alacrity sufficient to burn and destroy the garden, orchard, and corn stacks, as a reward to the treachery of the owner; even the fruit trees they split and tore in pieces with mischievous wantonness, and scarce a blade of grass escaped destruction. (IV, 63)

The gratuitous violence of this destruction underlines the tensions inherent in Walker’s representation of military, as opposed to naval, action.

If the alternating bellicosity and revulsion of Walker’s representation of warfare continues to disturb, a comparable ambivalence characterizes the impact of the conflict on Cinthelia and Mrs Jackson, as an emergent ideal of patriotic female heroism clashes with more restrictive constructions of domestic femininity. For women of gentle birth and refined sensibility, the price of heroism is emotional debility and physical exhaustion, which, in Mrs Jackson’s case, prove fatal:

The delicate constitution of her body, and the sensibility of her soul, both were wounded, and, after repeated faintings, she sighed out her life, in the arms of the heart-sick Cinthelia. (IV, 65)

Whilst Mrs Jackson’s death is precipitated by the loss of her husband and thus informed by notions of romantic sensibility, Cinthelia’s collapse is



entirely attributable to the horrors of war and the savagery of the troops, which shatter her peace of mind and propel her into illness and delirium:

Her soul sickened within her at the scenes which crowded to her memory; the devastation of the soldiers excited a shudder at their name, and the prospect of yet continuing with so inhuman, so brutalized a class of beings, held out the prospect of death as infinitely desirable. (IV, 66)

Whatever the gravity of the national emergency, and however courageous the female response, war remains an assault on feminine delicacy and in casting away the gown that simultaneously hinders and protects her, Cinthelia renders herself vulnerable both to the vicissitudes of the weather and to ‘the violent emotions of the day’ (IV, 65).

It is Major Watson who fortuitously discovers a domestic sanctuary in which Cinthelia can retreat from the conflict and recuperate from her illness. Disturbed by her plight and meditating on the best means of assisting her, he is wandering through the countryside not far from the British camp when he stumbles across a primitive backwoods settlement hidden deep inside a swamp. The inhabitants are not, as the major at first somewhat scornfully surmises, a band of utopian philosophers of the type that Walker would later satirize so severely in *The Vagabond*, but religious and economic migrants who have joined forces to protect themselves against the depredations of the Indians. As members of a society regulated

by its own laws and secure within its own borders, they have no interest in the wider conflict raging around them:

... we are only members of our own community, a little republic, if you will: we pay no taxes, we appeal to no court of justice, and therefore hold ourselves independent. (IV, 89)

Within this self-contained and self-supporting community, Cinthelia finds an asylum 'where the trumpet of war would not disturb her slumbers' (IV, 90). Unlike *The Vagabond*, which dismisses the idea of an American wilderness utopia as a confidence trick perpetrated by Jacobin philosophers and greedy land speculators, *Cinthelia* represents the life of the backwoods settlement as a pastoral Rousseauesque idyll, a pantisocratic 'garden of pleasure', in which the inhabitants 'had only to labour a few hours in the day to procure ample returns' (IV, 105).<sup>33</sup> Here, eventually, Cinthelia is reunited with her husband, nursing him back to health after he has been waylaid and wounded, and here, finally, Mobile acknowledges the wrongs he has done her and resolves on amendment, as gratitude for Cinthelia's care in 'administering to him, like a guardian spirit, with benignity on every feature' dispels the blindness 'which, like a mist, had clouded his senses' (IV, 123-4).

Significantly, however, Walker insists on the regenerative capacity of military service as the essential foundation for Mobile's rehabilitation,

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<sup>33</sup> Walker, *The Vagabond*, pp. 200-45.

which begins during the voyage to America, when he is first confronted with the reality of war. When the naval battle commences Mobile cowers below deck, incapacitated by fear and despair, until he is goaded by Mrs Tanjore into joining the action and, ‘not being an absolute coward, he behaved with some degree of bravery’ (IV, 11). While based in Charleston, where he still hopes that Cinthelia’s charms can be deployed to his advantage, the rigours of campaigning in the surrounding hostile countryside slowly teach him to appreciate his wife and treat her with greater kindness:

To say truth, the army is an excellent school for scoundrels, and brings many a man to his senses, after having lost them in the whirl of debauchery and extravagance: starvation teaches him the virtue of oeconomy, and want of opportunity restrains him from other extravagance. (IV, 20)

As the campaign progresses, ‘the exercises of war’ act as a corrective to the defects of his early schooling, enabling him to shake off ‘the effeminacy of his education, which trembled at a breeze, or fled from a sun-beam’ and teaching him the value of virtue and morality (IV, 128). At the same time, Walker acknowledges that the experience of combat through which Mobile learns ‘to divest himself of fear’ also teaches him ‘to raise above all the trifling feelings of humanity that might have suspended his sword from the throat of a sinking fellow-creature’ (IV, 16). This fundamental moral ambivalence is never resolved.

Cinthelia's experiences in America are not the end of her history. On returning to England she undergoes several more changes of fortune, and after the death of her husband accepts an offer of marriage from an early admirer whom she had previously rejected. Concluding his tale with a conventional moral summation, Walker informs the reader that, by taking duty as her guide through every vicissitude, Cinthelia exhibits 'the perfection of the female character, so far as human nature can ascend' (IV, 274). Crucially, however, the constitutive elements of that ideal are determined by Walker's response to the national emergency of 1797. The novel's American episodes provide an imaginative arena in which Walker simultaneously recreates the material consequences of war for domestic consumption and shapes a definition of female duty that is patriotic as well as domestic in nature. In pursuit of this agenda *Cinthelia* pushes against the boundaries of restrictive constructions of gender and class, and affords opportunities for the performance of civic patriotism to groups that were conventionally excluded. The boldness of this endeavour can be gauged from the disapproving comments in the *Analytical Review*:

An air of vulgarity is, perhaps, given by the author to the story in it's [*sic*] commencement, by the association of trade, compting-houses, ware-houses, etc. Heroes may be *men of poverty*, and heroines rural maidens, without derogating from their dignity; but, with all our respect for commerce ... these circumstances, if necessary to be

introduced, should be managed with the art of certain painters, who carefully throw into the background common and ordinary objects.<sup>34</sup>

As well as being insufficiently endowed with the ‘*romanticity*’ that the *Analytical Review* considered necessary for a work of fiction, the urban commercial class amongst whom the novel is set were often characterized as motivated by a vulgar self-interest incompatible with civic responsibility. By placing a group of ordinary London citizens at the centre of his novel Walker constructs an alternative possibility. *Cinthelia* not only defines a new patriotic constituency, but also works to procure its assent to a programme of national defence.

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<sup>34</sup> *Analytical Review*, pp. 415-6.

## Conclusion

In 1798, Charlotte Smith briefly revisited the events of the American War in her final novel, *The Young Philosopher*. Although the work reflects late 1790s liberal disillusion with the hope of political reform in Europe, her radical agenda is still apparent. Through the character of the hero's friend and mentor, the philosophic Armitage, Smith continues to link the American War of Independence with the French Revolution and to defend their common ideals. She also resumes her dialogue with Burke, who had died the previous year, by launching a sparkling satirical attack on his disciples. The most prominent of these is the hero's aunt, Mrs Crewkherne, who had once dined in company with the great man, and had been 'amazed, petrified, enchanted, carried to the seventh heaven by his eloquence'.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Crewkherne detests Armitage, despite his exemplary character, because he is a supporter of both the French and American revolutions:

She hated a man who affected to revere, and had written in favour of the Americans; nay, who had aided and abetted, as far as in him lay,

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, ed. by A. A. Markley (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), p. 66. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

the atrocious French revolution; for he had been present at Paris at the taking the Bastille ... and, on his return, had ventured to write a pamphlet, in which, while he exhorted the French people not to suffer themselves to be led by the first effervescence of liberty, into such licentiousness as would risk the loss of it, he hazarded a few opinions on the rights of nations and the purposes of government. (64)

In addition to this ‘mild and gentle pamphlet’ Armitage is also believed to have written ‘a very cutting argumentative book’ against one of Burke’s publications, an offence so heinous in Mrs Crewkherne’s eyes that it ranks with his introduction of the eligible English hero to the penniless and despised American heroine (66).

The complicated and melodramatic narrative of *The Young Philosopher* features disputes over inheritance involving two generations of the Glenmorris and de Verdon families that are never fully resolved. During the War of Independence, Glenmorris is kidnapped from his Scottish estate by privateers and transported to America, where he finds himself among:

a new race of people – a people who with manners, customs, and general habits of thinking quite unlike my own, had one great and predominant feature in their character which I loved and honoured – they were determined to be *free*, and were now making the noblest exertions to resist what they termed oppression. (183)

As soon as peace is restored he and his family emigrate to America, where Glenmorris completes his metamorphosis from Scottish chieftain to American farmer. The repressive polity of Scottish patriarchal clan society,

with its echoes of absolute monarchy, gives way to a new transatlantic republic premised on the liberty of the individual and freedom from old-world corruption. Comparing his simple life in America with the luxury, injustice and misery that characterize British society, Glenmorris rejoices in his decision to live ‘where human life was in progressive improvement’ (368).

*The Young Philosopher* testifies to Smith’s continuing support for the libertarian principles that informed the French and American Revolutions, and her unceasing determination to counter Burke’s reactionary response. The disputes over the possession of property and the rights of inheritance that bedevil Glenmorris and his family (as they bedevilled Charlotte Smith and her children) radically deconstruct Burke’s complacent account of a society whose virtue resides in the orderly transfer of land and wealth from one generation to the next:

The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice.<sup>2</sup>

This is not the experience of Laura and Medora Glenmorris, whose access to property is impeded by the labyrinthine workings of the law and the prejudices of a greedy and corrupt society, which are concretized in the

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<sup>2</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 44.



gothic episodes of persecution and imprisonment that test their fortitude and threaten their sanity.<sup>3</sup> Whilst Laura's prolonged and damaging exposure to tyranny embodies the evils of an absolutist regime, her daughter's spirited and successful resistance, the product of her American upbringing and education, anticipates the eventual downfall of the despotic state. After her abduction, Medora's captors quickly discover that there is 'no restraining a nymph who had been reared on the broad basis of continental freedom' (327).

Both *Desmond* and *The Old Manor House* conclude with an optimistic vision of reformed and renovated European estates, where the protagonists' libertarian projects can be realized. The liberal thinkers of *The Young Philosopher*, in contrast, are exhausted and disillusioned by their bruising encounters with corruption and injustice; fictional closure for them resides in a utopian vision of America and new concepts of citizenship and national belonging.<sup>4</sup> The novel's idealized account of American life aligns it with works such as Imlay's *The Emigrants* (1793) and Bage's *Hermesprong* (1796) and with the plans for an agrarian utopia on the banks of the Susquehanna that had preoccupied Coleridge and Southey earlier in the

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<sup>3</sup> The gothic character of *The Young Philosopher* is noted by Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, pp. 148-54 and by A. A. Markley in his introduction to the text, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> This aspect of the novel is explored by Nancy Johnson, "'Seated on Her Bags of Dollars': Representations of America in the English Jacobin Novel", *Dalhousie Review*, 82 (2002), 423-39; Leanne Maunu, 'Home is Where the Heart Is: National Identity and Expatriation in Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher*', *European Romantic Review*, 15 (2004), 51-71; and Adriana Craciun, 'Citizens of the World: Émigrés, Romantic Cosmopolitanism, and Charlotte Smith', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 29 (2007), 169-85.

decade. Like the radical dissenter, Joseph Priestley, who emigrated to America in 1794, Glenmorris and his family abandon Britain in order ‘to cultivate the earth of another continent, to carry the arts of civil life, without its misery and its vices, to the wild regions of the globe’ (368).<sup>5</sup>

Glenmorris’s cosmopolitan and trans-national understanding of citizenship is Smith’s final riposte to Burke, for it espouses the vision articulated by Richard Price in the Revolution Day sermon of 1789 that had provoked Burke’s wrath and inspired him to write *Reflections*.<sup>6</sup> In choosing America over Britain, Glenmorris rejects a society in which ‘the miseries inflicted by the social compact greatly exceed the happiness derived from it’, in order to embrace an ideal of citizenship which recognizes that ‘wherever a thinking man enjoys the most uninterrupted domestic felicity, and sees his species the most content, *that* is his country’ (432). By promoting Glenmorris’s representation of republican America as a utopian refuge offering multiple sites of possibility, Smith continues to celebrate the American War of Independence as a symbol of political reform, even from the anxious perspective of late 1790s Britain.

There is a widespread misconception, reiterated by Sarah Knott as recently as last year, that eighteenth-century fictional engagement with the American War of Independence ‘remained largely analogical. Very few

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<sup>5</sup> For a recent and detailed account of Romantic engagement with the idea of migration to America, see Michael Wiley, *Romantic Migrations: Local, National, and Transnational Dispositions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 55-102.

<sup>6</sup> Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*.

British or American novels set their dramas in the Revolution itself'.<sup>7</sup> As the preceding chapters have shown, this is far from being the case. Nearly two dozen novels published in Britain in the last quarter of the eighteenth century imagine or reflect on the conflict with the colonies. My research restores to visibility a series of texts that offer a compelling account of the ways in which late eighteenth-century British culture represented and thought about itself at a moment of national and imperial crisis. These texts not only modify our perception of how the war was perceived and represented within Britain, but also challenge some of the received ideas about the history and function of the novel as a genre in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Taken together, these works show that eighteenth-century novelists and their readers engaged with the American war and its aftermath in a multiplicity of ways and from a variety of political perspectives. They also demonstrate and take advantage of the wide-ranging opportunities that the novel as a form offered at this time. Fictional accounts of the war share the common function of replicating and reinforcing the traumatic and contested nature of the conflict within the nation at large, but their marked diversity of form, tone and address is a measure of the scale and difficulty of the cultural labour required to manage the impact of civil war across space, time and a range of political constituencies. In the most general terms, bringing this

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 63.

neglected literary terrain into focus achieves two things. Firstly, attending to these fictions enlarges our sense of the capabilities of the novel in the last twenty-five years of the century, and, in particular, foregrounds the development of the political capacities of the form well before the decade of the French Revolution. The proliferation of novelistic sub-genres in the later eighteenth century made the novel as a form hospitable to a wide range of concerns, including the political; it also meant that political concerns could be expressed through a variety of discursive modes. Secondly, the recovery of these neglected works tells a hitherto untold story about how, through the novel, Britain negotiated and disentangled its imaginary identity from the American colonies during and after the conflict.

In many ways these works can be seen as the culmination of the process, first articulated in early literary histories such as Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785) and comprehensively elaborated in the modern era by scholars such Lennard Davis, Michael McKeon, and J. Paul Hunter, by which the novel gradually rejected the 'fabulous persons and things' of epic and romance and accommodated itself to the production of 'a picture of real life and manners, and the times in which it is written'.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, these fictions' direct engagement with a specific and significant moment in history foreshadows (in some accounts even marks the beginning of) the

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<sup>8</sup> Davis, *Factual Fictions*; McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel*; Hunter, *Before Novels*; Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 2 vols (Colchester: W. Keymer, 1785), I, 111.

development of the historical novel.<sup>9</sup> The process of interpreting and commenting on public events through the medium of fiction is one that William Godwin certainly understood as historical. In an unpublished essay written in 1797, Godwin argues that the purpose of history is ‘to understand the machine of society and to direct it to its best purposes’ and asserts that this may best be achieved by ‘a composition in which, with a scanty substratum of facts and dates, the writer interweaves a number of happy, ingenious and instructive inventions’.<sup>10</sup> Fictional representations of the American War clearly fulfil Godwin’s requirement. What they lack, however, and what we have since come to expect from historical fiction, is the sense of cultural distance that Walter Scott identified as the feature that distinguished his *Waverley* novels both from the earlier ‘romance of chivalry’ and from the contemporary ‘tale of modern times’.<sup>11</sup> Unlike *Waverley*, which recreates the life of an earlier society and reflects on its place in the continuum of history from a distance of sixty years, fictional accounts of the American War remain palpably embroiled and entangled in the political events that they describe.

These works’ engagement with the process of historical change is riddled with the uncertainties and anxieties generated by the conflict with

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<sup>9</sup> For the view that Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* should be considered the originator of the historical novel in England see Kari Lokke, ‘Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond*: The Historical Novel as Social Protest’, *Women’s Writing*, 16:1 (2009), 60-77.

<sup>10</sup> William Godwin, ‘Of History and Romance’, published as an appendix to *Caleb Williams*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 359-73, (pp. 361, 368).

<sup>11</sup> Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. by Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; repr. 1998), p. 4.

the colonies, the post-war economic depression, and the ideological and political upheavals of the 1790s. With the possible exception of the novels that were written during the war years,<sup>12</sup> it could be argued that all the fictional accounts discussed in the preceding chapters position themselves, with varying degrees of assurance, in a moment that is neither truly past nor completely present, but which hovers uncertainly somewhere in between. Their involvement with the traumatic events of the 1770s is focused through an urgent engagement with their own contemporary political concerns, such as the post-war plight of loyalist refugees, the Regency Crisis of 1789, or the naval mutinies of 1797. These perspectives are overwhelmingly Anglocentric in nature. Although American writers would eventually set the conflict in the context of the birth and development of a new nation, the primary significance of the war for late eighteenth-century British novelists resides in its capacity to illuminate aspects of the contemporary British polity, its public and private institutions, and its wider imperial enterprises.

In *Bardic Nationalism*, Katie Trumpener emphasizes the links between the Waverley novels and the fictions that preceded them, arguing that the historical novel develops from the national tales of Edgeworth and Owenson, which, in their turn, ‘subsume key elements of the imperialist and anti-imperialist fiction of the 1790s’.<sup>13</sup> In tracing this generic development, Trumpener also glances fleetingly at a number of novels from the 1780s that

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<sup>12</sup> Emma Corbett, *Reveries of the Heart and Mount Henneth*.

<sup>13</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 165.

she characterizes as moving uncertainly ‘between nation and empire’.<sup>14</sup> It is with this group of novels, which has until now remained largely unexplored and whose full importance has not hitherto been recognized, that the novels of the American War belong. My account of these works shows that the transition which Trumpener documents, from ‘an eighteenth-century novel ... of picaresque and epistolary motion’ into ‘a nineteenth-century novel in which a society and a place pass through time together’, and whose origins she locates in the imperialist and anti-imperialist fictions of the 1790s, in fact begins much earlier, in the novels in which British writers confronted the revolutionary upheaval of the American War and the loss of a large part of the British transatlantic empire.

These texts’ concern with empire is conveyed for the most part through the conventions of sentimental fiction, and in developing new historical and political functions for the novel they draw heavily on existing traditions. Their engagement with politics, in both the broad and narrow senses of the term, is mediated primarily through the use of a discourse of feeling that is almost ubiquitous in the late eighteenth-century novel. Sentiment, sensibility and sympathy are notoriously slippery critical terms but may be considered interchangeable in so far as they can all be used to describe a community, whether national or familial, united by shared feeling

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<sup>14</sup> Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 168. Among the novels that Trumpener includes in this category are Bage’s *Mount Henneth* and *The Fair Syrian*.

rather than by ethnic, geographic or economic interests.<sup>15</sup> The use of sentimental discourse is not confined to the novel, but the sentimental novel is unique in that it both explores the workings of sympathy in the fictional society that is described within its pages and simultaneously creates a community of readers whose shared experience generates the same sympathetic bonds. My work both critiques and extends recent scholarship of the ways in which sentimental discourse was implicated in and circulated around eighteenth-century representations of nation and empire. Lynn Festa has warned that these literary practices are not always as benign or politically innocent as they may at first appear.<sup>16</sup> The distinction between sentimental subjects and the objects of their sympathy, who tend to be constructed as passive and disempowered victims, often reinforces and perpetuates the hierarchical differences between privileged and non-privileged groups that sentimental texts purport to break down. Festa's work on the relation between sentimental discourse and figures of empire has exposed the contradictions inherent in a mode that simultaneously

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<sup>15</sup> The vast body of work on eighteenth-century sentimental literature includes R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*; Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*; Jones, *Radical Sensibility*; Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*; and Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See also G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). See also Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*; Evan Gottlieb, *Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing 1707-1832* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007); Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity 1745-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).



encourages readers to identify with the feelings of others and upholds their own distinct, and implicitly superior, identities. Festa shows how a wide range of eighteenth-century sentimental texts, including novels, poetry, medallions, journals and travel narratives, both challenge and consolidate French and British imperial operations, particularly in the East and West Indies. As I have shown, fictional accounts of the American War also resonate with the anxieties of empire, but the nature of those anxieties and the literary practices through which they are expressed are rather different from those that Festa describes. For as long as writers (and readers) continued to attribute a British identity to the American colonists they largely contrived to bridge the gap between subject and object that Festa scrutinizes and analyses so minutely, and on which she bases her critique of contemporary sentimental discourse. They do this primarily by promoting a liberal construction of the family as a community united by ties of affection rather than as a patriarchal entity, which they offer as a model both for the British nation and for the wider transatlantic empire.

My research is also significant for its provision of a British perspective on the war that complements and amplifies Sarah Knott's recent work on American constructions. Knott argues that the American Revolution was socially as well as politically transformative and that it 'emanated in part from cultural commitments to sensibility that were

brought to the fore by imperial turmoil'.<sup>17</sup> She suggests that 'the transatlantic circulation of sensibility allowed colonists to see themselves as part of British culture and also apart from it', and draws on Festa's analysis of sentiment as a mode of both differentiation and coalescence to support her own account of the ways in which Americans sought to create a new sense of nationhood during and after the break from Britain.<sup>18</sup> The sentimental fictions that I deal with in this study share a belief in the circulation of sensibility that Knott describes, but deploy it instead to support the web of cultural, familial and affective connections that constituted the liberal British idea of the transatlantic empire.

Both Knott and Fliegelman identify the anti-patriarchal narrative as the archetypal American story of national origin. Knott suggests that, when seen from a purely American perspective, sensibility was an inherently contrarian pose which 'responded to ... even needed, a cold, hostile, indifferent world', and thus lent itself to the politics of a quarrel in which Americans perceived themselves as the victims of tyranny and the embodiment of 'virtue in distress'.<sup>19</sup> Like Fliegelman, she notes that in America novels of parental persecution, such as *Clarissa*, were read as political paradigms that offered a 'literary parallel to America's flight from

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<sup>17</sup> Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, p. 22.

its parental tyrant'.<sup>20</sup> As might be expected from works that reflect a British perspective even when they are opposed to the war, the novels in this study tell a story that is more complex and conflicted. There *are* examples of tyrannical and unfeeling fathers in the novels discussed in the preceding chapters, but they are few and far between, and rarely central to the narrative. Charles Corbett is a significant exception, but his tyrannical behaviour is equated with Patriot politics and support for America, not with imperial coercion. Elsewhere, a strong emphasis on the tenderness and concern shown by fathers towards their children counters the negative imagery associated with the sternly patriarchal constructions of family and empire against which the American colonists rebelled. However, the absence or early demise of sympathetic fathers is a recurring theme in many fictional accounts of the war, revealing anxieties about the paternal and imperial role so strong that they suggest a subtext of symbolic patricide. In many of these texts a father's absence leaves his children (both sons and daughters, but particularly the latter) prey to a variety of dangers, compelled to construct alternative forms of familial organisation and identify new sources of stability. Their narratives reflect the post-war British need to find, and to articulate, new modes of national and imperial belonging.

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<sup>20</sup> Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, p. 83. See also pp. 83-9 for a particularly cogent account of the impact of Richardson's *Clarissa* on the rhetoric and ideology of the American Revolution.

Sentimental discourse offered British writers a number of potential models for the post-war nation, some of which find their way into the accounts that this study examines. The strongest and most politically resonant of these is the community founded on friendship and a shared belief in the power of sentiment, which replaces or supplements families that have been torn apart or found deficient by the pressures of conflict, or that were unable to prosper in a polity that had forfeited all claim to civic virtue. Some of these sentimental communities flourish even in the midst of war, or were called into being by its exigencies. Novels reproduce the same sentimental paradigms but deploy them for rather different purposes, as might be expected from their resolutely Anglocentric perspective. In Knott's account, officers of the Continental army draw on the ideology of sensibility to imagine themselves as a fraternal community that is the prototype for a new republican nation, whereas the authors of *Emma Corbett*, *Helena* and *The Voluntary Exile* extol the sensibilities and conduct of American army officers, and their commander-in-chief, in order to perpetuate the view that they remained members of an extended transatlantic family, who continued to be brothers-in-arms even when they fought on the 'wrong' side. In the context of a civil conflict, in which, as Knott usefully reiterates, 'a variety of ideologies and affiliations were at stake', such fine distinctions are crucially important.<sup>21</sup> In most fictional accounts of the war, both British and

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<sup>21</sup> Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, p. 154.

American officers are depicted as members of a cultured military elite. They function as the bearers of national virtue and their sentimental credentials underwrite the construction of the Atlantic empire as a benign affective community.<sup>22</sup> However, images of British soldiers as paragons of honour, politeness and chivalry perform an additional ideological task, since they also serve as a plea in mitigation, designed to alleviate the stigma of defeat and the charges (sometimes justified, as in the case of Baylor's massacre discussed in Chapter Two) of military misconduct that had tarnished the reputation of the British army. And yet the appearance of the sentimental man of feeling on the battlefield also has a distinctly subversive edge. Many of the military officers portrayed in fictional accounts are volunteers such as John Amington, Harry Courtney and Henry Biddulph, or newly commissioned officers like Orlando Somerive, whose accounts of their service in America convey the profound anxieties felt by many in Britain concerning the conduct and morality of the war. Whilst their cultivated sensibilities work in part to justify and elevate the cause in which they are engaged, they also recognize the horror of war and underline its fundamental futility.

The loss of the American colonies dealt a fatal blow to British perceptions of their nation as an extended transatlantic family, engendering feelings of perplexity, anger and regret that are reflected in many fictional

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<sup>22</sup> *Reveries of the Heart* and *Jonathan Corncob* are notable exceptions.

accounts. The war was in almost every sense a failure, and was widely perceived as a national humiliation. As Charles James Fox informed the House of Commons after the surrender at Yorktown in 1781:

We have lost thirteen provinces of America, we have lost several of our islands, and the rest are in danger; we have lost the empire of the sea, we have lost our respect abroad and our unanimity at home; the nations have forsaken us, they see us distracted and obstinate, and they leave us to our fate.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the expenditure of vast sums of money and a huge loss of life, the colonies gained their independence. In the process, the surrender of supposedly elite forces at Saratoga and Yorktown dealt a devastating blow to British self-esteem, whilst the employment of Indian and German auxiliaries undermined the ideology of civic virtue through which the military activities of the state were traditionally mediated to the nation at large.

The uncertainties about national values and identity that the war engendered in Britain are embodied in the narrative devices that many fictional accounts offer to their readers as a means of absorbing or palliating the loss of the transatlantic nexus. Repeated scenes of disruption and displacement re-enact the trauma of separation, imaginatively representing the personal and political dislocations that defeat brought in its wake. The separation of families and lovers may eventually find resolution in a

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<sup>23</sup> William Cobbett, *Parliamentary History of England*, 36 vols (London: Longman et al, 1806-20), vol. 22, 27 November 1781.

conventional novelistic ‘happy ending’, but unions and reunions in these novels are rarely a matter of uncomplicated rejoicing. Too much has been lost in the process. Although Helena Courtenay and Lucinda Franklin remain determined to continue their friendship through the medium of letters, they are acutely aware that transatlantic epistolary exchange is a poor substitute for the immediacy of personal conversation. Cross-cultural marriages between Britons and Americans are either forestalled by death (*Julia*) or enabled only by a permanent resettlement that involves relinquishing one national identity in favour of another (*Mount Henneth* and *The Voluntary Exile*). The journeys described in *Reveries of the Heart* and *Jonathan Corncob* do not end in settlement but seem to anticipate a state of permanent wandering or exile. In *Emma Corbett* and *Julia*, the unconventional family units that coalesce around newly born infants highlight the losses of the past even as they underline the need to regroup in the face of an uncertain future. But this elegiac undertone is only part of the story. Of all the novels in this study, only *The Young Philosopher* seeks closure in the repudiation of British identity; the majority express the hope of future reformation and regeneration. The utopian communities of like-minded friends that are Robert Bage’s favourite closure device shed an uncomfortable light on the imperfections of the British polity but they also suggest the possibility of reform, as do the restored estates in which the heroes of Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* and *The Old Manor House* are finally

ensconced. Apart from *The Young Philosopher*, all the novels in this study seek a future for their protagonists within the British Isles. The utopia at Mount Henneth is firmly located in rural Wales and *The Fair Syrian* and *Desmond* envisage constant cultural exchange between an enlightened British landed gentry and their newly regenerated counterparts in France. In all these fictions, the break with the American colonies, even with its attendant loss of national prestige and self-confidence, is by no means the end of the story.

It is, however, the end of a paradigmatic national and imperial narrative. With the loss of the American colonies, the concept of a transatlantic British family supporting and supported by an ‘empire of liberty’ founded on trade and commerce became impossible to sustain. There were fewer British ‘plantations’ within the empire, and correspondingly more territory and peoples that the British claimed by right of conquest and over whom they ruled without consent. In post-war Britain, the focus of attention and anxiety changed dramatically, as the misgovernment of India and the evils of the slave trade came to dominate public debate. From this time onwards, the sentimental familial rhetoric of the ‘first British empire’ begins to give way to the discourses of evangelical awakening and enlightened protection that would underpin British imperial ideology throughout the nineteenth century.



Fictional accounts of the American War of Independence show how political discourse, and the depiction of recent events and conflicts, can be accommodated within the novel form. By highlighting the public and polemical potential of a genre that, particularly in its sentimental guise, had tended to emphasize the private and personal, they pave the way equally for Jacobin and anti-Jacobin fiction, and for the historical novel. We should not underestimate their significance. Their retrieval from oblivion allows us to see the British nation and empire in the very process of re-formation.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1756 Seven Years War begins
- 1757 Clive's victory at Plassey
- 1759 The 'wonderful year': British victories at Guadeloupe, Minden, Quebec, Lagos, Quiberon Bay; death of General Wolfe; Garrick composes *Heart of Oak*; Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (vols 1 & 2); Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*
- 1760 Death of George II and accession of George III
- 1761 The elder Pitt resigns as Prime Minister; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*
- 1763 Peace of Paris brings Seven Years War to an end; Britain takes possession of Quebec
- 1764 John Wilkes expelled from Parliament
- 1765 Rockingham's Stamp Act; American non-importation campaign
- 1766 Repeal of Stamp Act; Rockingham replaced by Pitt (now Earl of Chatham); Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*
- 1767 Imposition of the Townshend duties provokes angry protests in America
- 1768 Foundation of Royal Academy; Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*
- 1770 Boston Massacre; Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*; Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*
- 1771 Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*; Tobias Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*

- 1773 East India Regulating Act; Tea Act; Boston Tea Party; Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*
- 1774 The Coercive ('Intolerable') Acts; Quebec Act; Edmund Burke, *Speech on American Taxation*; John Cartwright, *American Independence the Interest and Glory of Great Britain*; Samuel Johnson, *The Patriot*
- 1775 Edmund Burke, *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies* (March); hostilities break out at Lexington and Concord (April); Generals Howe, Clinton and Burgoyne arrive in Boston (May); Battle of Bunker Hill (June); American forces occupy Montreal (November) and lay siege to Quebec (December); Samuel Johnson, *Taxation No Tyranny*; Richard Sheridan, *The Rivals*
- 1776 Burning of Norfolk, Virginia (New Year's Day); Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (January); British evacuate Boston (March); Burgoyne relieves Quebec (May); American Declaration of Independence (July); British attack Long Island (August) and occupy New York (September); Washington defeated at White Plains (October) then retreats through New Jersey and across the Delaware (December); Washington re-crosses the river on Christmas Day and gains victory at Trenton; Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*; Samuel Jackson Pratt, *The Pupil of Pleasure*; Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*

- 1777 Washington eludes Cornwallis, defeats the British at Princeton and encamps near Morristown (January); Burgoyne crosses Lake Champlain and takes Ticonderoga (July) but a large contingent of his Hessian troops are defeated at Bennington (August); Howe defeats Washington at Brandywine and occupies Philadelphia (September); Washington's attack on Germantown is repulsed (October) and he encamps for the winter at Valley Forge. Burgoyne is defeated at Freeman's Farm and Bemis Heights and his army surrenders at Saratoga on 17 October; the news reaches England on 3 December; Henry Mackenzie, *Julia de Roubigné*; Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*
- 1778 Franco-American alliance (February); France declares war on Great Britain (March); John Paul Jones attacks Whitehaven and St Mary's Isle; Burgoyne and Howe return to England and Clinton is appointed Commander-in-Chief; British evacuate Philadelphia (June) and capture Savannah (December); Great Britain declares war on Holland (December); Frances Burney, *Evelina*; Phebe Gibbes, *The American Fugitive*
- 1779 Trial and acquittal of Admiral Keppel (February); Spain declares war on Great Britain (June); Admiral d'Estaing takes St Vincent and Grenada (July); French and Spanish fleets appear off Plymouth (August); Clinton and Cornwallis lay siege to Charleston (August); Christopher Wyvill forms the Yorkshire Association (December)

- 1780 John Dunning's motion to curb the influence of the crown gains a majority in the House of Commons (April); Charleston surrenders (May) and Clinton returns to New York (June); Gordon Riots (June); Rochambeau lands on Rhode Island (July); Major John André captured and hanged as a spy (October); Britain declares war on Holland (December); Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Emma Corbett*; John Burgoyne, *A State of the Expedition to Canada*; John Singleton Copley, *Death of Chatham*
- 1781 French attack Jersey (January); Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown (October); *Reveries of the Heart*; Anna Seward, *Monody on Major André*
- 1782 House of Commons urges the king to conclude a peace (February); Lord North resigns (March); Rodney's victory in the Battle of the Saints saves Jamaica (April); repeal of Declaratory Act (June) and Poyning's Law (July) give Irish Parliament legislative independence; British evacuate Savannah (July); peace negotiations begin in Paris (November) and George III recognizes American Independence (December); Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth*; De Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*; Frances Burney, *Cecilia*
- 1783 Establishment of Loyalist Claims Commission (July); peace treaty signed in Paris (September); Fox-North coalition dismissed by the King and Pitt becomes Prime Minister (December); Helen Maria Williams, *Ode on the Peace*
- 1784 John Singleton Copley, *The Death of Major Peirson*; Helen Maria Williams, *Peru, a Poem*; M. R. Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Mis Mac Rea*; Joshua Reynolds, *Mrs. Siddons as Tragic Muse*
- 1785 James Boswell, *Tour to the Hebrides*; William Cowper, *The Task*; Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*

- 1786 Robert Burns, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*; Henry Lemoine, *The Kentish Curate*
- 1787 Constitution of the United States signed in Philadelphia; impeachment of Warren Hastings; *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob*; Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian*
- 1788 The Regency Crisis; *The School for Fathers*
- 1789 Storming of the Bastille (14 July); march to Versailles (6 October); Richard Price, *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (November); William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*
- 1790 *Caroline, The Heroine of the Camp*; [H. Scott], *Helena, or, The Vicissitudes of Military Life*; Helen Maria Williams, *Julia*; Fete de la Fédération (July); Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*; Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*
- 1791 Flight to Varennes (June); Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (Part 1); Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*
- 1792 Prussia and Austria declare war on France (April); September Massacres; French monarchy abolished and France declared a republic; French defeat Austrian army at Jemappes (November); Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (Part 2); Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*; Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*
- 1793 Execution of Louis XVI (January) and Marie Antoinette (October); France declares war on Britain (February); allies defeated at Hondschoote (September); British expedition to Toulon ends in failure (December); William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*; Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*

- 1794 Parliament suspends Habeas Corpus; leading English radicals arrested (May); Admiral Howe defeats French navy off Brittany (The Glorious First of June); border fortresses of Charleroi, Condé and Valenciennes fall to the French; Hardy, Thelwall and Tooke acquitted on charges of high treason (November); Charles Stedman, *A History of the American War*; Charlotte Smith, *The Banished Man*; William Godwin, *Adventures of Caleb Williams*
- 1795 The French occupy the Low Countries and seize the Dutch fleet; Parliament passes Pitt's Two Acts (The Seditious Meetings Act and The Treasonable Practices Act); food riots; allies defeated at Tourcoing (May); Eliza Parsons, *The Voluntary Exile*; Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*
- 1796 Supplementary militia act; abortive attempt to land French troops in Bantry Bay (December); Frances Burney, *Camilla*; Robert Bage, *Hermesprong*; Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art*
- 1797 French troops land near Fishguard but are quickly captured (February); British naval mutinies at Spithead (April) and the Nore (May); Admiral Duncan defeats Dutch navy at Battle of Camperdown (October); George Walker, *Cinthelia*
- 1798 Irish Rebellion (May); Nelson's victory at the battle of the Nile (August); Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher*; Wordsworth and Coleridge publish *Lyrical Ballads*
- 1799 George Walker, *The Vagabond*
- 1800 Napoleon invades Italy; British liberate Malta; Parliament passes the Act of Union with Ireland (takes effect 1 January 1801)

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